LIFEDEATH

A Collection of Short Stories

Edited by Kereth Cowe-Spigai and Patrick Neighly.

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A COLLECTION OF SHORT STORIES

KERETH COWE-SPIGAI & PATRICK NEIGHLY

First published July 2001
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All proceeds from this fanzine have been donated to Amnesty International
Published by Ambrosia Press
Ken Barr and Diane McClamma, Owners/Publishers

Harm no one. Give without taking. Help those who are hurting.

IN A UNIVERSE FULL OF WORLDS, NO ONE NEEDS TO BE ALONE.

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FOREWORD

BY KATE ORMAN

I've been a Doctor Who writer and a member of Amnesty International for many years. And yet, when I was asked to write an introduction for this anthology, I was daunted. What could be more different than the world of Doctor Who, with its whimsical fantasy adventures, and the work of Amnesty — all too real, and deadly serious?

But then, reading through some of the stories, I realized that there is some common ground between these two disparate parts of my life. That common ground is hope.

One part of us needs an imaginary hero like the Doctor, someone who the secret police can't keep locked up, who can topple a totalitarian regime overnight, whose adventures usually have a happy ending. Another part of us needs the real-life happy endings brought about by Amnesty's campaigning. AI's Australian newsletter devotes a column to the good news of the release of political prisoners on behalf of whom it has asked members to write. There is something extraordinary about realizing that, with thousands of others, you were part of setting someone free.

We need heroes — imaginary and real, whether a single dashing figure like the Doctor, or a worldwide organization made up of individuals, each playing a part, large or small, in making sure every human's rights are respected.

After all, while there's life, as the Doctor might remind us, there's

always hope.

May, 2001

INTRODUCTION

BY KERETH COWE-SPIGAI

I am not a Doctor Who fan.

Not strictly speaking, anyway. I've only seen a dozen episodes, plus the TV movie with the Eighth Doctor. I've never read a Doctor Who book. My experience with the Doctor has been largely vicarious. Yes, I am the friend of a Doctor Who fan.

Perhaps Doctor Who fan does not adequately describe his zeal. I'm reluctant to call him a Who fanatic or Who freak, because he (to my best knowledge) is not suffering from any mental diseases. Let's just say he is a walking and talking Who encyclopedia, who doesn't live and breathe Doctor Who as a fanatic would, but rather, lets the Doctor live and breathe through him.

So, I know what a TARDIS is, why it looks like a police box, that it's really, really big on the inside, and that the Doctor is a Time Lord from Gallifrey. I also know that he dresses better than most heroes, as I've never seen or heard about the Doctor sporting brightly colored spandex and a bulletproof cape. That's not to say the Doctor is a boring dresser. Certainly not. Fashion-wise, the Doctor with the scarf has them all beat. But they all wear something that more or less reflects their character. That is perhaps true of all heroes. And if you'll forgive my lack of class, spandex is for wimps.

Let me say it once more. Spandex is for wimps. Insecure wimps at that. Wimps who need to show off their astonishing musculature to

intimidate others. Wimps who use their fists to solve almost every problem they encounter. Of course, I have to put my foot in my mouth now and confess to being a *Batman* fanatic, and it is okay to use that word, because I am positively ridden with mental disease. But there is a certain charm about the Doctor. Something that elevates him above the heroes I am a fan of.

Heroes are the men and women who get off their asses and do something about the evils of the world. They are the ones we look up to and aspire to be like. And while the JLA has the superpower to go global, the Doctor has a friggin' space-travelin' time machine. Now here's a guy who can really make a difference! And he does. And that is the coolest thing about Doctor Who.

So, while I may not be a fan, I respect the guy. He is, for all intents and purposes, an average Joe (except of course for the two-hearts-and-thirteen-lives thing). But he doesn't shoot optic blasts or pop unbreakable claws out of his hands. He doesn't control the weather. He can't leap much more than a toadstool in a single bound. He's not even a martial arts expert. But he always does what he can to make things right.

And while I can enjoy reading about Batman, he is an impossible hero. I can't do what he does — namely, wear a tight kevlar body suit and battle psychotic villains. But the Doctor on the other hand ... well, he is a hero with possibilities. I can do what he does. I have to restrict my activities to Earth, and in all likelihood my community. But I have the ability to stand up for what I believe in and correct the problems I am able to. I can serve food in a soup kitchen. I can tutor underprivileged kids. I can refuse ignorance. I can defend the down-trodden. I can speak out when I witness injustice. And I should. Just as the Doctor does.

So this book is for Amnesty International, another group of heroes. People who act. People who do everything they can. People who, like the Doctor, remind us that there is a hero in all of us. Because the world doesn't need one man to save it. It needs all of us.

MY BROTHER AND THE DOCTOR: ADVENTURES IN TIME AND SPACE

BY BEN BROWN

"Exterminate!" came a harsh voice from the other room. I looked up to find my brother with a sink plunger in his hand, doing a rather cheap impression of a Dalek. They might look like threatening pepper pots on the telly, but in the form of my little brother — nothing. But I still managed to raise a smile. Yes, I hate to say it: My brother is a Doctor Who fan. Every week he would sit round the TV and watch the adventures of a man with brown curly hair wearing a fedora hat, an incredibly long scarf and that toothy grin. The Doctor used his wits to thwart the forces of evil that were the Daleks or the Cybermen, travelling in a time machine (a police box) that he called the TARDIS.

After Mum watched *Juke Box Jury* and Dad watched the football results, for those 25 minutes when the Doctor was on the box, the house was in total silence. My brother Tim sat cross-legged on the floor with Mum and Dad squashed on the sofa. Every Saturday was family time. Millions of families around the country were in the same situation. There was many a time when my little brother would either hide behind the sofa (or the next best thing, a cushion) as soon as a monster like a Dalek came on the screen — he seemed to enjoy the fear of the show. Dad always used to say that the monsters were just men in rubber suits, but that didn't stop our enjoyment.

The stories were always the same too, but that didn't matter. The Doctor would arrive on a planet. Nine times out of ten the TARDIS

wouldn't take him where he wanted to go, but he would discover that something on the planet was wrong — some injustice or other. He would get together with the natives, and they would fix the problem.

I started out as a non-fan, but I began to like that little program. The bits I liked were the cliffhangers every week. The Doctor would seem to get into an impossible situation, which of course he would get out of, but you just had to watch to find out how. My brother was impossible when the Doctor wasn't on the TV. After each installment was over, he couldn't wait for the next episode. Seven days was a long time to him — too long to wait.

Tim was overjoyed when we found a batch of Doctor Who books at our local W. H. Smith. It gave him something to read while waiting for the next episode. He liked the idea of having a collection of stories he could read again and again. With excitement, he read the adventures of Doctors he hadn't seen; adventures that featured the dandy who dressed in frilly shirts, bow ties and smoking jackets — an action man who loved to play with gadgets. And there was a Chaplinesque cosmic hobo who travelled with a Scottish piper called Jamie.

Originally, there was the Doctor who started it all off — the stem grandfather figure who travelled with two teachers from Coal Hill and his own granddaughter. Her strange talents caught her teachers' curiosity and they eventually met the strange Doctor in a junkyard on Totters Lane.

* * *

Dad said he always watched Doctor Who for the stories, but me and my little brother had a theory that he watched the program for another reason altogether. You see, we thought he had secret hankerings for the Doctor's female companions. They always seemed to be very good looking and wore very short skirts. Not that I noticed, of course! I looked at my dad through the comer of my eye while he was watching an

episode of what he called the "worst program on TV," and when Leela came on the screen, I could have sworn he was smiling. I know what he was thinking. He was dreaming of stowing away on the TARDIS with the Doctor and going on a few adventures, escaping his humdrum life at work and perhaps getting the chance to meet the lovely Leela at the same time. I was thinking the same thing. Sex on Doctor Who? Never!

Leela was a Sevateem warrior that the Doctor picked up on an unknown planet. My little brother described her as a cave woman and, accordingly, she wore very little. She was a tall woman with brown hair, brown eyes, a tanned body and, as I said before, she had the shortest skirt going. She had bit of a penchant for violence, especially in the use of janus thorns.

My first crush was on Jo Grant. Of course, I kept this quiet for fear of embarrassment. Years later, I moved to new pastures and fancied Romana II instead. I always did like blondes.

* * *

On Tim's eighth birthday he got all sorts of cards and presents. Mum had made him a cake, and she brought a big box from the kitchen, which was carefully wrapped. He unwrapped it to find a talking Dalek, one that could speak three phrases. The Dalek travelled across the floor like a dodgem car at the fairground. Its harsh voice came to life: "You must obey!" Even a toy Dalek sent a shiver down my spine. Then came the next present. To this day I remember my brother's face as he opened the envelope. His face lit up like all his Christmases had come at once. It was tickets to a Doctor Who convention in our area. For the next two weeks, my brother counted the days. He couldn't contain his excitement.

"Do you think I will meet the Doctor, Dad?" he asked.

"I don't see why not." Dad smiled.

The fateful day arrived. We had to get up early to get there, and we arrived at the convention hall to find it full of people. It seemed my

brother wasn't the only fan after all!

"Look over there, Dad. The Doctor!" my brother shouted, jumping for joy. He looked just like he did on telly, scarf and everything. He was sitting at a table signing autographs. My brother, my dad and I joined what seemed like an endless queue, but eventually we got to the front. My brother was standing next to his hero, the one he watched week after week! He suddenly became very shy.

"Isn't there something you would like to say?" asked Dad.

My brother's tiny little voice said, "Hello Doctor."

"Would you like a jelly baby?" the Doctor asked, handing him the bag. He gingerly took one and smiled.

"Would you sign this, please?" asked my brother, handing him a book.

"Who do I make it out to?" the Doctor asked.

"Tim," my brother said. He smiled as he read the inscription. *Best wishes Tim — the Doctor*

Dad saw Lela across the room. He walked up to her and said, "I don't normally ask, but could you sign this?"

She smiled. "Are you blushing?"

"Me? No." He took back the paper, which read: *With love, Leela.*

My brother had a great time mixing with his heroes. Boy, did he have a story to tell when he went to school in the morning.

Going to school the next day, Tim was treated like a hero. He held the Doctor's autograph up in the air with a smile, like a child who had just gotten hold of the last ticket to the FA Cup Final. To him, that piece of paper was like gold dust. I told my dad about this little scene and he told me a story of when he was younger and in the playground of his old school. It was 1964, amid the mass hysteria following the Daleks' first appearance on the show. My dad smiled as he remembered the younger kids going round the playground with their arms outstretched, mimicking the masters of Skaro with cries of "Exterminate!" He told me that it was a time when the Doctor was still a man of mystery; you didn't

know that he was a Time Lord and that he had come from a planet called Gallifrey.

* * *

Saturday arrived once again, and we began our weekly ritual of sitting round the small box. That day, dire news reached our home. Dad's favorite companion, Leela, was leaving the show. It was like the world had ended in our house. Dad was inconsolable for at least a week, and when she did leave some weeks later he complained bitterly.

"Look at that," he said. "She's a warrior, for God's sake. She should have sacrificed her life to save the Doctor, not married that soppy Andred."

So then the Doctor left his home planet with only his robot dog in tow, intent on going on holiday. But, as usual, saving the universe got in the way. I wondered as I watched the first episode of *The Ribos Operation* whether Time Lords had holidays. On this evidence they didn't, because no sooner had he mentioned the word holiday than the TARDIS changed its course to meet a being called the White Guardian. The Doctor was sent on a mission to find the pieces to a cuboid called the Key to Time. All the family watched as the Doctor reluctantly accepted his new companion: Romanadvoratrelundar, or Romana for short.

I still missed Leela. Dad said, "I know what you mean."

I replied, "This companion's got a bit of an ego, hasn't she? So what if she got better marks on her exams. The Doctor has the experience, doesn't he?" I thought about this afterward, me defending the Doctor. I didn't even like the program. Like the rest of my family, I watched it to keep my little brother happy.

* * *

Over the next 26 weeks of adventures, we saw a robot captain, stones

that liked to drink blood and one big giant slug. I mean hey, why not? But there was one episode that changed my life forever, or so I thought at the time. The story was called *The Armageddon Factor.* The plot went like this: Romana and the Doctor land on this planet looking for the final piece for the Key to Time. The key turns out to have taken the human form of Princess Astra. As soon as this princess appeared, I couldn't take my eyes off the screen. She was beautiful and tall, with blond hair. As I mentioned earlier, Jo Grant was my first crush, but as soon as this girl came on the screen I'm afraid Miss Grant went out the window. So you can imagine my surprise the following season when the girl of my dreams was announced as Romana II. My jaw dropped to the floor.

"But that's Princess Astra," I said.

"No, it's not." Tim laughed at my state of shock. "That's the new Romana. She's travelling with the Doctor now. Haven't you been watching?"

"Of course," I said, turning away in embarrassment.

I was very happy for the next few weeks to see my dream girl travelling with the Doctor. Then I read that the chap who played him, a Mr. Tom Baker, was going to get to married to this new companion. Needless to say I envied the man. Lucky fella. Maybe there was sex aboard the TARDIS after all.

Then came the next big announcement to shake a child's world. It was nothing compared to the Leela thing that shook my dad's world. This announcement sent a ripple though time and space. It was the bombshell that Tom Baker would be leaving Doctor Who and, as the newsreader said, the Fourth Doctor would travel through time and space no more.

The effect on my brother's playground was catastrophic. It was like a national day of mourning. All was quiet on the playground except for the talk about who the next Doctor would be. What would he be like and what would he wear? We didn't have to wait long. There was something on the news saying the next actor would be Peter Davison, or as my dad

called him, "that bloke off *All Creatures Great and Small"* The announcement made all the girls in my school happy. They said they found him good looking. I had visions of girls putting pictures of this new Doctor on their bedroom walls and kissing them before they went to bed.

So my brother and I watched Tom's last season. It seemed that we might be the only ones watching. I had heard that many kids on our street were watching something on another channel called *Buck Rogers*, which had flashier effects and better stories. But my brother was loyal to our hero. He was rewarded with some great stories, a new title sequence and a new prog rock version of the theme tune. Tim was horrified to learn that both K9 and Romana II were leaving. I helped Tim write to the BBC to try to get them to change their minds. It was to no avail. My dream girl and the dog that Dad called the perfect pet both left the show. Of course, there were other companions: Adric, Tegan and Nyssa. But it wasn't the same.

Tim and I watched Tom Baker's final episode as the Fourth Doctor; he tried to save the whole universe from being destroyed. He succeeded, but at the cost of his own life. But, as the Doctor said, the moment had been prepared for, and as the Doctor sat up from the ground in a new, younger body, a tear rolled down my face. But not because I'm a fan, mind you. I was sad for Tim. Really.

As the credits rolled, I knew it really was the end of an era. My dad looked at me and said "Do you think that bloke from *All Creatures Great and Small* will be any good?"

I smiled and said, "He'll be fine."

AT THE BEACH

BY SIMON BUCHER-JONES

"You've seen the manifest?"

"Yes, and a more surly bunch of thieves, con men and child molesters the old London *has never carried. I tell you we'll have trouble this trip ."*

"Control thinks so too. I have sealed orders. We divert. Not Cygnus, it's... too soft. It's run by a cult now. Cults are unreliable. Its days as a prison planet are numbered."

"So we ditch them. Into space is cheaper, I always say."

" Oh no. Someone... hates... these prisoners. The new orders say they get the Block."

The man on the seashore was building a castle as the turning tide began to sweep back. He knew he had maybe two, three hours at most to form the walls, dig drainage ditches, prepare barricades. He worked calmly, methodically, whistling to himself, for all the world as if he wasn't going to die.

The mica of the beach wasn't that firm a foundation even mixed with urine, and the acid pools, however diluted, were too damaging to the hands to moisten the available materials.

At his back, the sea wall was an unclimbable sheet of fused glass, and at the top of it his captors were setting out their deck chairs. The Block was an inescapable prison, not only because of its size and design, but

because once outside, once on the beach, there was nowhere to go. He'd escaped, and now no one was going to pull him back up the wall. They were just going to watch — oh, and videotape him, to provide useful reinforcement for the other prisoners.

He wasn't going to look at the wall. If he did, he knew he'd be able to see just how far the bleaching and burning waves of the sea rose; he'd know if his hope were possible or whether a wave tall enough to flick a bracing, sizzling spray an inch or so over the wall's top would sweep away any possible efforts.

But he did look, of course, because otherwise he wouldn't know how high the castle walls needed to be.

* * *

Inside the prison, a man whose papers identified him as an inspector general was cooling his heels in the chief warders' office, waiting for someone to get back to him. It hadn't escaped his notice that his tewachi was getting cold, and the sub-warder hadn't come back with any cake as promised, and the gap between the door's edge and wall had formed a single molecule when the warder had gone out. The inspector had white hair that framed his head like a halo, and a face like a dissipated eagle.

He sat on the desk and unfastened the top button of his red-lined judicial cape, letting a faint breeze from the air conditioning ruffle his layered silk shirt. His hands ran a quick arpeggio across the desk's inlaid ivory keyboard.

He got the wall to turn into a flat-screen display. He got the Beach.

The man on the screen had a mop of black hair, and he was short, though somehow the prison-issue pants' legs and tunic sleeves still ended a good inch before his feet and hands. Yet despite his build he had to be immensely strong, and he worked swiftly, as if his life depended on it.

The Doctor recognized the man on the beach at once. It didn't make it

any easier. Along with the time-travel codes the Time Lords had ripped from his memory had gone a swathe of other recollections; that he'd been here before was one of them. He had no memory of it.

All he had was the box. The Time Lord message box that had materialized on his lab bench, identical to the one he had carried to Solos. When he'd seen the destination the Time Lords had set for him and the set of inspector's credentials lying on top of it — his free pass to the most dangerous prison planet of the latter days of the Federation — he'd made sure that he hadn't brought anyone with him. He hadn't wanted to bring Jo here, to see the future glory ending in black-uniformed horror. He hadn't wanted to risk having hostages to fortune. Now he'd found that the worst one in the world was already here.

What hostage could be closer to his hearts than himself?

He found out soon enough, when he broke the coding on the prisoner lists.

On the death orders. They were due to dump another seven prisoners on the Beach at full tide. They'd be pitched out of the black walls, squealing, to skid down into the acid. Not a show, not a failed escape, just a routine house clearance. Unlike the little man he watched on the screen — for he'd somehow made it through, hadn't he — mustn't he? — to have survived, to have his appearance altered by the Time Lords into his own features, to end up their long-lease skivvy and messenger boy. Unlike him, the prisoners would have have no chance, no chance at all. Five unknown names and two he recognized. Jamie and Zoe. Maybe his former companions too had survived if he had, but still he couldn't remember any of this, and he felt deep inside that somehow all bets were off.

* * *

There was a bitter stinging wind, and a smell that caught at the throat. Death was rolling in. The Doctor ignored it and got on building the inner

bailey. He knew he had to break the inrush of the waves by a succession of barriers to weaken and subdue the tide. He was rather pleased with the crenulations nevertheless. Did it make it less real to him, did it make him frivolous to think that this whole life was the gift of the Time Lords', a moment in time cut and stretched out, that maybe he could die here, and still elsewhere the other strand of his life, cut and changed and sent to Earth, would survive in some unknown and unknowable form? He hoped not, and wished he had some flags.

* * *

In the gray metal cell, where the air was musty and old and there were no air vents, the saturnine man wasn't pacing and his face was like death. Jamie had seen men like him in the wars with England, people who had seen death and death and death again until it ran in their blood like black fire. He'd been in some massacre, Jamie guessed, seen his kin or his girl gunned down. Around them, the thief was pacing, testing the door, every circuit, until Jamie wanted to scream at him, *It's a wall ye bam pot, just a wall, it's fixed like magic, y'Sassenach!* In the far comer the calm man, the big one, was clenching his hands as if they were going to break, and maybe he'd break first. He had some control, Jamie reckoned, but it was like a dog's leash and the dog was scared.

Zoe was talking to the leader, the grizzled man in green, and the fair-haired woman was watching her like an enemy.

* * *

The Doctor heard boot heels click along the corridor and hastily got up from the desk and straightened the chair. He left the screen on though, as if he didn't dare turn it off. The door opened. It wasn't the underling he'd dealt with before, oh no. The chief warder had a familiar beard, and wore his Federation uniform as if it was an insult — though whether to the

wearer or him, the Doctor wasn't sure. Seeing him, the Doctor groaned. "Am I never in this life to be sent somewhere where you are not the proverbial bad penny?"

"Now Doctor. Solos, of course, and Peladon twice. If that hasn't happened yet don't worry about it, there are reality changes all around that area and, oh, a dozen others, all entirely free of my presence. Besides, this isn't a 'Doctor is sent somewhere to thwart me' matter. This is different." The Master pointed to the tray. "Fresh tewachi, and cake." He took a sip from one of the cups and a tiny bite from a slice of cake, and sat back behind the desk.

The Doctor nodded and pointedly took the other cup and a fresh piece of cake. He wasn't worried about poison.

"What did the Time Lords let you remember?" the Master asked, his back to the Doctor now, black-gloved hands clenched behind him as he contemplated the screen and the sandcastle builder.

The Doctor sighed. "Not much. Sub-time technology's all there. Gossip and snippets of past encounters with famous people — all of a jumble — and bits of cosmic lore that sound as if they were clipped from travelogues. I must sound like a club bore half the time."

"My dear Doctor, half the time you sound psychotic, but I wasn't referring so much to that, as this."

He pointed at the screen. "This travesty, this hypocritical breaking of their own laws, this discarded thing."

Turning, he grinned evilly, and the Doctor's face fell. "You didn't know that they rewrote you, took an incarnation of you who had avoided them his whole life and turned him into a servant? Blocked memories! They must have been shoveling the tapes into a flaming furnace. They made him."

"Why is he here now?"

"He's on your mission." The Master sat down behind the Chief Warder's desk and leaned forward.

"He's failing, and when he fails, they don't save him. Instead they

send you, into this narrowest window of opportunity. Into this crowning moment, the moment you should see."

"Why?"

"Because now the puppet's strings break." The Master leaned forward. "Unless of course we can find an agreement."

"You're saying I die here?"

"A part of you, certainly. May I?" The Master reached for the time box that the Doctor had under his cloak. "That was intended for the headman here and, well, let's just say he's no longer quite so big for his boots."

Maybe the Doctor should have been surprised when the box opened, but he wasn't. He'd learned too much already. The Master lifted his hands in affirmation, and the Doctor could see the glint of DNA pads on the tips of his black gloves. His old friend reached inside the box and pulled out six cards. Black lettering on white pasteboard. Get out of jail free!

"A touch, an undeniable touch," the Master smiled. "Someone in the crowd of Machiavelli's tortoises has a sense of humor." The cards warped, changed. Official looking now. Black seals, red print, watermarked and hologram impregnated, anti-forgery locked with a molecular coating. Only one line blank on each, a gray shimmer for a person's name. The Doctor knew that cards were thought receptive; he had only to think the names he wanted to appear.

"Stays of execution," the Master said, "all signed and dated and agreed by the Federation Council, left open to you, the replacement inspector, to carry out, to deliver to the... replacement... Chief Warder. Carte blanche. Lifted of course from a more liberal timeline, an attempt to halt a chain of time-shaking events originating in a gim-crack time experiment ten years in this galaxy's future. From an age when the legend these prisoners would have made stands on the brink of shattering an empire. I imagine the Time Lords are releasing the relevant data in your mind now."

Flashes. A tyranny. Freedom fighters. A failure, and yet a clarion call that would in the end be heeded. An image of worth reaching forward in time until thrones toppled. The desire to end opposition in its cradle somehow given a physical opportunity. A gamble he was here to stop.

He was to fill in the forms. He was to name five names. He was to order the death sentences quashed and have them shipped to another prison, one they should have been sent to, one they would escape from. He was to specify the exact course their ship should take, at double speed. He was to be a puppet like the one on the screen, building his bloody sandcastles.

He looked at the Master. "Your alternative is?"

"Write Doctor John Smith, Zoe Herriot, James McCrimmon on the forms. The staff here see me as the Chief Warder. They'll go down on the Beach and haul him up. They'll get his humans from the death cell and they will live. No tricks. All you have to do is let three people die instead, three people who'll die anyway eventually. I'll make it easier, if you want. I'll tell you the ones who stand the least chance of changing things by their absence. Some of them were due to die long before the others. Terrorists and criminals always use up lives so quickly—"

"I don't want you 'making it easier!"' the Doctor shouted. "I will not kill others to save myself. I will not kill others to save my friends."

"I know you are the kind of fool who'd sacrifice himself. Now I see how quickly you'd kill a stranger. Remember, it isn't 'you' that will die, but another person, a person with all the claims to life of one of these dead-end revolutionaries who won't last three years against the Federation. But I see that won't move you. I can see you've discarded him and his friends already. I can see it in your eyes, Doctor. You'd let a temporal doppelganger die like so much shed skin tissue. You talk a good 'renegade,' Doctor, but cut your hearts open and you'd see 'Gallifrey' written there like a cancer. I'm not killing anyone here, if you'll exempt the Chief Warder, and his death was, I assure you, a miniscule problem in ethics. He was the worst kind of psychopath."

"A judgement which you no doubt found yourself well qualified to make," the Doctor spat. "I'd be interested to know what you regard as the worst form of that condition."

"Touché, Doctor. I would say an absence of self-knowledge, if I were pressed, and maybe an... obsession with fine clothing, if I were being facetious." The Master let his eyes rove over the Doctor's inspectorial finery. "I see you dressed for the occasion. Oh, I know, I know, it's a disguise. It always starts like that." He waved a gloved hand dismissively. "I only wanted to explain that I didn't cause this tangle; I am merely exploiting it. I'm simply ensuring you understand the importance of your decision, that's all."

The Doctor put down his cup and said five names. Quick, clean, military. The Brigadier's best parade-ground bark.

"You sanctimonious monster," the Master snarled. "And you dare to judge me." He had a short black rod in his hand now, the weapon that shrank his victims into molecularly compacted dolls gasping out their lungs' inability to absorb oxygen through too fine a membrane, as their overheating bodies died. "Now we'll watch you die."

He glanced behind him, quickly, daring the Doctor to try and jump him.

The Beach was empty.

* * *

"I've done it!" the thief danced back, shouting. "It's like an enzyme, you see, a living molecular zip. It can't hold if enough of the teeth come apart, and they can be vibrationally disarrayed. There's a rhyme lock. It might be a failsafe pattern in case a guard gets pushed in a cell in a riot! I'm brilliant! Somebody tell me I'm brilliant!"

The dark man with the face of death was at his shoulder. "You're brilliant," he said sarcastically, "but you didn't unlock that alone. I watched you apply the pressure, and the fourth site shifted on its own

just as you brought down your hand."

"What are you saying?" The little thief looked hurt. "Are you saying it was unlocked from the other side?"

"Oh yes, that's right," a soft voice said. A head topped with a mop of thick black hair pushed open the sliding wall and a man fell headlong into the room. "Don't mind me. I'm only here to rescue you." He coughed harshly.

"Doctor!" Jamie and Zoe were at his side in an instant, only to recoil from the acrid smell around his clothes.

"Quickly, Jamie, Zoe! My boots, quickly!" He started a frantic jig and the two youngsters knelt, hurriedly unlacing his boots as the heels continued to disintegrate. To the others: "You do know your locksmith here's been opening the wrong wall. This is the disposal chute for this cell; it would bring you out into an ocean of acid. I managed to build a ramp up to the chute level. Had to disguise it so they'd leave me in peace to work. Only way to reach here was from the outside. All the security is concentric, you see, running out from the ship landing pad at the center."

"I'm afraid we don't see." The curly haired man in green's voice was thoughtful, resonant, yet hard. Not the ice hardness of the man in black, but still a voice that refused to be relegated to a bit part in someone else's story. "You say you're here to rescue us. Why us specifically?"

"Oh, now that I can't say. You'll do great things. Isn't that enough? Suppose that there was a power... Oh, no, no. Oh Jamie, what would you say?"

"I'd say be grateful you've got someone to get you out of this cell, and cut your blather."

"Well " the dark man said, "we are still in the cell, and as the... Doctor... remarks, on one side we have the ocean of acid, and on the other the rings of guards. It's kill or be killed, isn't it?"

Zoe scowled at him. "Nothing of the sort. There's always a third way, isn't there Doctor?"

"Yes, yes, Zoe. Please excuse her, she was a Blair's Babe for a week

when the Nestene took over the Cabinet fixtures in 2001." The mop-haired man raised a silver whistle to his lips. In response, a trembling, groaning sound filled the room.

"This is it!" the thief shouted. '"They're going to eject us into the acid. I don't want to die!"

"No, no, no," the Doctor chided. "It's a shortcut to your liberation."

* * *

"You know your problem?" the Doctor asked. "You've never learned to trust anyone else, and as all the best psychologists will tell you, the key to doing that is knowing when to trust yourself."

The Master, tied hand and foot to the chair, glared at him. If looks could kill, the Doctor would have had curlier hair and bigger teeth. "Munnt hww r yyuuu hhrr ff hhss nt dd?," he managed, trying to spit out the gag.

"Why would they send me here if he didn't die?" The Doctor repeated, smiling. "I can only assume he never reported back."

* * *

"Right Jamie, Zoe!" The Doctor rubbed his hands. "Who'd have thought a band of ragamuffins like that would have a computer genius and the galaxy's greatest lateral thinking thief in their midst? I think we've done it. We've really done it. That whey-faced tribunal won't be ordering us about any more."

"Oh aye, with Mr. Grumpy and yon drunkard's help."

" Now, Jamie, I thought Kerr was very sweet," said Zoe.

"Aye, it's Kerr now, is it?"

"Why, I do believe you are jealous."

"Hush." The Doctor grabbed their hands and pulled them ring-a-rosy around the console. "Doesn't it sound different? Even the TARDIS knows

we’re free at last. Free to have some really new adventures.”

SOMETHING TERRIBLY IMPORTANT

BY EVAN WATERS

I am going insane.

It was the only explanation Zoe could think of. Her tired eyes somehow refused to close, forcing her into consciousness. With a great sigh, she gradually sat up in bed, fear overtaking fatigue. She touched a panel on her nightstand; a row of soft amber lights mounted over the headboard cast their dim glow around her. The faint patter of rain was heard from the outside. An alarm clock read 02:36. Zoe reached up and felt a thin layer of sweat on her forehead.

This was ridiculous. It was just a nightmare. Not even that, really; just before she awoke, she remembered things were going rather well. But whatever it was, it was like the others. There was the same intensity, leaving her short of breath and suffering a headache. She remembered it as well as the others, and was probably as unlikely to forget it. Most disturbingly, it was the same circumstances as before, the same people; part of a set, repeating endlessly.

She knew why the Doctor was there, at least. After all, the encounter on the Wheel had been a formative, even traumatic experience. And it was not just the event, though the Cybermen had also appeared during her sleep. There was the Doctor's vivid personality, his way of getting things done despite seeming so clownish. She couldn't help but remember him, causing him to show up in her dream life as a kind of... father figure? That was the Freudian interpretation, anyway. Jamie was

another matter altogether, and Zoe wasn't eager to explore what that naive, macho young man meant to her subconscious. Dreams as wish fulfillment? Joining up with a caring parent and an attractive but non-threatening male, heading to exotic ports of call?

It was the specific people and places that she couldn't explain. This time it had been a wasteland, and a small village in the midst of it, and a kind of temple or palace; some imposing steel structure built into the rock. There were people there, and they sent men to be the slaves of... she couldn't remember the name, but they were like crystals, or robots, or both. They subjected her and the Doctor to a mental assault, trying to enslave both of them before finally being defeated. Why would she go there, be subjected to that? She always suffered in the dreams, met horrid beasts, did stupid things, wore ridiculous clothes; it was all highly irrational behavior. Another one of the dreams made even less sense, with Medusae and unicorns and Jamie's face being scrambled, all in some kind of forest of letters with mist everywhere.

Nothing in her waking life seemed to fully account for the dreams. After the Wheel, she'd gone back to Earth, to the Pearce Astrophysics Center in London, where she'd been for the past three months. After the first month, she'd settled in; the rest of the time it was just working on a dark matter theorem one of the other doctors had started and abandoned. No further traumas, no great stress, no relationships (which explained the prominent male figures but little else), no early childhood problems, nothing noteworthy besides the one event, the attack on the Wheel, something she'd worked through consciously, talking with fellow crewmates who'd also endured the Cybermen's attack. Even that incident didn't account for all of the images, all of the journeys, all of the weird escapades like something out of a comic strip. She couldn't think about it in psychological terms anymore; it was just something pressing, twisting somewhere in her head, gradually disrupting the rest of her existence, creating cracks in her conscious mind, fissures that threatened to widen into faults.

While she sat, trying to collect herself, she became aware of a sound over the rain, a sound both strange and familiar. It was a faint rumbling of sorts, a grinding of gears along with an echoing electronic pulse. It lasted for perhaps five seconds, finishing with a clunk. A feeling of deja vu rushed over Zoe, and she stood up, as if propelled to investigate. However, her fear reasserted itself, and she became fixed in place next to the bed. Was that the ship? The TA— Her mind worked to calm itself down. She knew she'd only heard it because she was half awake, groggy, not thinking straight. That noise, that spillover from her dreams, had jarred her back into reality; she'd be all right, she just had to calm down.

When the doorbell rang, she nearly jumped straight up. She steadied herself, taking a deep breath. Someone coming to her flat this early in the morning might be abnormal, but it wasn't a sign that she was going mad. Probably someone from the Center, with an urgent finding of some kind or another; Dr. Kenzer in particular was never prone to keeping regular hours.

"Who is it?" she called, trying to sound pleasant.

"Oh dear," came the reply. The voice had a rough texture to it, but was cultured at the same time. "I just noticed the time. I probably woke you, didn't I?"

"Actually, no." She let out a sighing laugh. The voice wasn't familiar, but it wasn't threatening, either. "I was already awake. Who is this?"

There was a pause. "That's a bit difficult to explain, really."

" Do I know you from somewhere?"

"You probably won't. I know you pride yourself on having a good memory, but under these circumstances..."

"How about if you simply give me your name?"

"Well, all right. It's the Doctor."

Damn. She hadn't stopped dreaming. Now they were getting incoherent; the Doctor's voice was nothing like that. Still, there was nothing to do but play along.

"You don't sound like the Doctor," she said, moving to the door.

“I probably don’t. Come to think of it, no, not at all. Oh dear, I really should’ve thought this part through better. It was so easy with Jamie...”

“Jamie?”

“Yes. Wait! That's it. Jamie! Scottish chap, black hair, tartan skirt, not terribly intelligent? You do remember him? The fact that I know who he is should be something to go on.”

“It doesn’t prove anything. If this is my dream, and I know who Jamie is, then it’s not unusual that you would.”

“A dream? You think you’re asleep?”

“Probably sleepwalking. I just hope I don’t injure myself.” Zoe looked at a screen next to the door. The man in the corridor was tall, lean, with white hair and a thin face. He wore a frilly shirt and a ridiculous cape. Zoe giggled.

“Glad as I am that you’re enjoying this, I need to clear up something. You are most certainly not dreaming. If you were,$_t$ I wouldn’t be here, and I didn’t earn my freedom from the Time Lords so that I could not be places.”

The Time Lords. She gasped as the mention of the phrase sent a sharp pain through her head. Her vision was briefly engulfed by a blur of bright greens and yellows. She doubled over, steadying herself against the wall with one hand. She rubbed her still-throbbing eyes as the pain slowly faded. The man spoke again.

“I’m sorry, Zoe, I shouldn’t have said that.”

“What do you mean?”

“Well, the Ti— Sorry. They probably made that area of your memory particularly hard to access. You’d be less likely to think about them if it hurt you to do so.”

Zoe straightened up. Her previous fear began to dissipate. She most definitely was not dreaming; that pain was too real. Whatever was happening now had something to do with her mind, and whether or not that man was the Doctor, he knew something about the dreams and why they were taking such a toll on her waking life. She had to find out. After

throwing on a robe from a nearby closet, she opened the door.

"Hello, Zoe." The man smiled. Zoe paused as she saw him face to face. She noticed something that she hadn't seen on the monitor. Behind his eyes, there was some kind of shape moving, a cloudy, luminescent form. She felt that it almost wasn't a real image, but rather a kind of signal, something her brain couldn't recognize and was showing as visual information. She'd seen it before. She knew this man. "Doctor? It... It really is you, isn't it?"

"You *are* observant. Usually only other Gallifreyans can pick up on the optical recognition pattern. And even we can make mistakes."

Zoe stepped to the side of the door, flipping on the lights. "Would you like to come in? There's no need to wake the floor with our conversation."

"That does sound like a good idea." The Doctor entered, and Zoe gestured him to a table next to the kitchen. He took a seat facing her. The room seemed quieter; the rain outside had calmed to a drizzle.

"So, what was it you were saying about my memory?"

" Have you been having nightmares?"

There was a pause. "As a matter of fact I have."

"About you, Jamie, me, the TARDIS?"

"Yes."

"Ice Warriors, toy soldiers, space pirates?" Zoe nodded. "You don't seem surprised that I'm asking you this."

"I'd hoped that you would. It would mean you knew something."

"Yes, well, fortunately I do. These particular dreams, well, they're not dreams. They're memories."

A longer pause this time. "They really happened? All of them? I... I travelled with you and Jamie after you left the Wheel?"

"Actually, you snuck on board. In Earth terms, I'd say you were with us for about a year."

Zoe believed the Doctor and doubted him at the same time. The dreams had felt real, of course, but there was still a gap between them

and true reality. She could sort through her conscious memories, summon them up and dismiss them, but the dreams came and went freely, formless things never falling into line with her organized thoughts.

"Why can't I really remember this?" she asked. "Why are they dreams instead?"

"Do you want to hear this tonight? It's a long story."

"I'd rather not go to sleep again until I've settled this."

"Very well." The Doctor cracked his knuckles and leaned forward. "Near the end of our time together, my own people found me. I'd violated their laws by interfering with the course of time, you see. All those adventures, battling monsters and stopping invasions, I'd tampered with history, at least by their reckoning. So, they captured me, you and Jamie. By their orders I was exiled to Earth, to remain there indefinitely. That's when they changed my appearance. Another punishment." Zoe didn't quite understand that part, but she decided not to interrupt for now. "In order to repair some of the damage I'd done, they put you and Jamie back in your own respective times and places. They rejuvenated you to negate any effects of aging during your travels, and erased your memories of all but our first encounter, before you went off and discovered what I really was."

Zoe nodded acknowledgement. Sometime after the Cybermen had been defeated and the Doctor had 'left,' she'd found herself in a corridor on the Wheel without knowing how she'd got there. It was as if she'd been sleepwalking, except that it was the middle of the day. She recalled having an overpowering sense that she'd forgotten something terribly important.

"The Gallifreyans made one mistake," the Doctor went on. "Their mind-altering technology was very crude, and not as effective as they would have wanted. They couldn't truly erase your memory, not without causing massive cerebral damage. So instead, they found the portions of your memory they wanted to be rid of, and neuronically transferred it

from your conscious mind to your subconscious mind. They decided any influence from these repressed memories would be minimal, and wouldn't matter so long as you never remembered travelling through time. However, these memories were so strong that they couldn't be fully repressed. Dreams are the only way that your unconscious can handle them. Blame it on the wonders of Gallifreyan technology."

Zoe sighed. "So I'm not going mad."

"Well, technically, no. However, you're not quite well, either. The people who did this to you have ripped away great chunks of your life experience. They've pushed back a vital part of who you are, and as agile as your mind is, it can only take so much. I knew you were in danger. When the High Council finally released me from exile, I made getting to you and Jamie a priority. If this is allowed to go further, you could very well go mad, or even die."

Suddenly Zoe came to a realization. "If you were released from exile, that means you can still travel in time, right? Why didn't you immediately go back to where I was sent?" Her voice contained hints of anger and fear. Why did he let it go on this long?

"I'm very sorry, Zoe. The TARDIS may be working again, but it has never been too reliable, and I was unable to steer it as precisely as I wished. I actually made two trips, one to this time period, and another after I'd found out where you lived." Zoe calmed down. It had been like that at least once. "You know, Doctor, this makes sense. I probably should believe you. But it's still not quite real to me. The dreams still don't feel like memories."

"Of course. My merely telling you this isn't going to help any. I've come here for another reason. With a little tinkering I should be able to persuade the TARDIS to take us to the planet Desalai. There's a group of buildings there, halfway between temples and giant musical instruments. They're hewn out of the natural rock, which is unlike any other mineral in the universe. The harmonic vibrations have been known to relax tension and open up the subconscious mind, almost like hypnotic

therapy. A few days of rest, and you should be able to piece things back together at last. You won't be tormented by your dreams any longer."

That final promise was all Zoe needed to hear. "Of course I'll go."

"I had a feeling you'd accept."

"Just step outside while I get dressed, and then we'll be off."

"Very well, then."

The Doctor stepped back into the hallway; on the screen Zoe could see him waiting patiently. She went through her closet and threw on the first thing she could find, not caring much for appearance. From her dreams she remembered that the ship had an extensive wardrobe and other facilities; there was no need to do any packing. Just a short holiday, and then on with the rest of her life.

After a few minutes, she joined the Doctor outside, and they walked down a rarely used stairwell. At the bottom, in the comer, stood a blue box, weather-beaten and out of place. She entered the impossibly large control room and watched as the Doctor began to throw levers and switches. Again she heard the pulsing and grinding of gears. Earlier the noise had startled her, but now it was soothing and familiar. This had been her home once. The experiences that her dreams hinted at weren't ordeals; they were adventures, each one uniquely rewarding, her suffering always followed by triumph. She had been part of something very special. It was all starting to come back.

AN ACT OF TERRORISM

BY WILLIAM BILLINGSLEY

Ace could hardly see. Stepping from the floodlit interior of the TARDIS into the darkness outside had been like going blind. She stood at the edge of the island, blinking her eyes against the rain, huddling her jacket against a frozen wind, and staring across the water at New York's city lights, sadly unreflected by the waves. Even the great green glow from the Statue of Liberty towering above her could not lift the weary wet-weather feel. She kept looking into the distance until at last she could make out the faint line between sea and clouded sky.

This was her first visit to New York, but somehow it had all looked so much better on television.

"This is it?" she asked. "You think the end of the world's going to start here?"

The Doctor was near the base of the statue, searching in some gloomy shadows. Outside, with no walls to give it a lively echo, his voice sounded empty as he called back.

"This is where the war'll start. Someone's going to blow the statue up. It's odd; terrorism's not usually that effective at starting wars, but they seemed certain. Our friendly aliens will quietly join in the fighting on both sides."

There was no one else about. Even at night, Ace thought there would be a security guard to watch over the statue, but there was no one. She thought about glancing at the water's edge to see if she could spot a

policeman's cap being lapped up and down, but that would have been morbid. She turned toward the Doctor instead.

"I think I can understand why the French gave her to the Americans," Ace said. The Doctor ignored her, but she grinned anyway. "They wouldn't want to keep a hideous thing like this in their own country, would they?"

"There's a twin statue on the Seine next to the Eiffel Tower," the Doctor pointed out.

Ace was nonplussed. "Why do they want to wipe us out anyway, if they're not interested in the planet?" she asked. "Too many wars. They want to end the fighting "

"By killing everyone?" She was a little distracted. She had not even seen the informant, or the aliens, and all she knew of any danger was what the Doctor had told her. In the cold on an island that was the epitome of dull reality, she was finding it hard to believe the world was at risk.

"They worked out that if the human race went on for another thousand years, there would be more people killed, maimed and bereaved than the population of the planet right now. They think they're preventing all that suffering. With weather like this, I'm tempted to believe they're right. Oh my" The Doctor's voice stopped.

"Oh my?" said Ace, and ran toward the Doctor. He was standing in front of an oil drum at the base of the statue, with his hat clasped to his chest. Inside was something that looked like half-congealed pancake mixture. A short pole stuck out of the goop, with a timer attached and some thin strands of wire trailing back down into the mix.

"I think I've found the bomb," the Doctor said and threw his hat to Ace. "Get back in the TARDIS. I have a feeling we've not got very long."

Ace looked at the display. "Eleven hours? That's ages to defuse something like that."

"The counter won't go all the way to zero." Reaching into the pocket of his dark brown coat, the Doctor pulled out a complex-looking

multimeter. He leant over the top of the barrel and started poking the metal probes against the exposed electronics of the timer. Frowning and biting his bottom lip, he tried to keep the white muck off the probes while he prodded the electronics. All the while, Ace crept around until she was standing behind his shoulder, staring into the barrel. She was determined not to get left out; this time she was determined to know what he was up to.

The Doctor slipped the meter back into his pocket, leaving dribbles of the white explosive down his coat and trousers.

"How long?" Ace asked.

"Half an hour. We can't move it much, and I don't think we can empty it, but perhaps we can get some of this stuff out. Tip the barrel up a little," said the Doctor, taking off his coat. Ace slid between the barrel and the base of the statue, and slowly tipped the barrel up. The Doctor held the pole in place with his left hand, and began using his right arm to scoop the explosive mixture out and onto the ground.

"How bad is this stuff?" Ace asked. The Doctor ignored her and continued his frantic scooping. The front of his clothes were painted with a thick drippy coating of explosive, and as he went on, he was having to lean further and further into the barrel until he was almost disappearing inside. At last he stood up, and began hurriedly scraping the explosive on the ground toward puddles, where it dissolved and washed away.

"How bad is this stuff?" Ace asked again.

"The aliens must have given it to them. There was enough there to obliterate the whole island. What's left could still knock the statue off her feet. It's not so much terrorism as a show of force — when the Americans find out this stuff was used, they'll go to war just for the weapon. How long have we had?"

"Eight minutes "

"Come on then," he said, rushing toward the TARDIS door, dripping white all behind him.

Ace followed him into the TARDIS, but the Doctor had already gone

through the inner door. She could just hear his footsteps echoing from one of the mazy passages. At length, she heard him coming back again, running along pushing a wheelbarrow filled with three sacks of powder. It looked like it was cement. He overshot the inner door a little, turned around and pushed the wheelbarrow to the door. It wouldn't fit through. He winced and leapt over the barrow.

"Come on, come on!" he called, picking up the comer of a bag with each hand and dragging them backwards through the console room to the doors and the island outside. Ace picked up the last sack in both arms and, leaning back under the weight, ran after him.

"What are these going to do?" she asked as she ran across the slippery ground outside.

"Save the world!" came the dramatic reply from the Doctor, as he packed the bags between the barrel and the statue. "We just need to pile them around the bomb," he shouted, running past her again to fetch more of them. Ace leant her bag against the front of the barrel and ran back into the TARDIS.

A minute or two later, the Doctor was at the inner door again with the next barrow load. He pulled *the top* two sacks off quickly enough that the barrow tipped up, dumping the last one out before landing noisily on its side. Again, he grabbed two sacks by the ears and started jogging backwards to pull them outside. Ace paused before pulling the barrow sideways through the doorway. She hefted the last bag back into it and set off after him. When she was just over halfway to the statue, the Doctor, coming back, took the barrow from her, tipped the bag out on the ground and ran on toward the TARDIS. Ace sighed. Picking the bag up in her arms again, she tried to find an easy way to hold it and ended up hugging it as she carried it along. She was staggering by the time she got to the statue, and wondered how a short and apparently unexercised Time Lord seemed to cope comparatively easily with the workout. The Doctor met her again when she was halfway back to the TARDIS; this time he was pushing a barrow full of bags.

“So, two hearts are better than one,” he grinned. “Get a camera!” he said and continued on his way. Ace looked at him, confused. She followed him and helped him arrange the bags around the bomb.

“How will that help?” she asked.

“Get a camera. We’ve got to show we tried,” the Doctor replied.

Ace went back to the TARDIS and scrabbled around under her bed for her camera. It always seemed that no matter what she did, the Doctor would not let her in on his plans. When she returned, he was wiping the dust off his hands, and dust and muck from his jumper. The bags were stacked up covering one side of the barrel, facing the statue and round toward the TARDIS. Ace bit her lip, worried. If the bomb could blow the statue from its base then surely a few bags of cement were not going make any difference. She glanced at the Doctor. He had saved so many worlds so many times, and every time she had no idea how he was going to manage it.

Every time she had been either amazed or irritated by the tricks he kept up his sleeve. She wished he wouldn’t keep them from her. She handed him the camera and watched as he took five quick photographs from only slightly different angles.

“How long?” he asked. She looked at her watch; if the Doctor was right, there was just over a minute left. The Doctor picked his coat up and together they retreated to the safety of the TARDIS.

Inside the TARDIS, the Doctor flicked a few switches, opened the monitor and went through the inner door. Ace was left staring at the monitor, at a screenful of statue, desperately hoping that the lady would not vanish.

Twenty seconds to go, and all she could think of was the pitiful-looking bags of cement, sand, salt or whatever it was, sitting between the barrel and the statue. Perhaps it was a chemical, something strange and alien that could absorb the blast. Perhaps it was the Time Lord equivalent of a bulletproof vest. She stared at the screen in frustration and despair. A second to go, and she held her breath.

For a moment the screen went white with the explosion. Then it flashed and faded into a whirling display of Brownian motion as dust and smoke surrounded the TARDIS. For more than a minute, Ace was left staring in desperation at a screen that would not let her see more than a few inches outside. Then, finally, the speckled gray of the smoke was replaced by the flat gray of the clouds. The TARDIS had fallen over, and inside she hadn't even noticed.

She could hardly breathe. Had the statue fallen or hadn't it? She tried to open the doors, but the console wouldn't let her. She had thought she would know as soon as the bomb exploded. She looked around for the Doctor, but he was not even in the room. He wasn't even watching. He had disconnected the TARDIS from the outside. He already knew. Then she looked at the screen again, and she knew. She dropped to her knees. If the TARDIS had been blown over from a distance, the statue must have fallen, too. She was still kneeling there with her eyes closed when the Doctor came back in.

"Don't worry, they'll build another one," he said.

"But the world, the war!"

"Won't happen." He smiled at her, though she wasn't looking. "They didn't blow it up. We did."

He dropped a postcard on the floor in front of her. The postmark was perfectly forged, and so was the faked claim of responsibility. Pictured on the front, piled up bags of ordinary chemical explosive stood at the base of the statue. The pole and timer seemed to be sticking up from the middle of them, but the alien barrel could not be seen.

HAYAT

BY DORIS SPEED-KELLER

Stumbling, Hayat fled over the rock-strewn valley floor toward the hills. She had to reach the mountainside, where she could hide in the caves at least for a while. Maybe for a day. She imagined she heard her pursuers but realized it was her heart beating loudly in her ears. Tears obscured her vision as she scrambled up the first incline. Dawn would soon wash over the valley, so she forced herself to go faster, giving herself a chance of escape. They hadn't brought out the dogs to track her down. Maybe they were certain she wouldn't get far, and that they would apprehend her without trouble.

Her breath came in uneven gulps. She needed to rest soon. Still scrambling on, she fumbled for her water flask. It was one of the few things she managed to stuff into the hold-all her brother Adi had brought her from abroad. Adi, who had laughed at their way of life and called them backwards, might defend her. He had said he would send money so she could join him in the far away city. He had promised he would look after her and said she could go to university and study whatever subject she wanted. Dreams, all just stupid dreams. He was too late and couldn't protect her from the old laws. She was told to obey her father and obey the laws as they stood. Maybe the laws were right? How dared she to question them? Maybe Adi should accept that he didn't know all the laws of Allah and shouldn't laugh, but learn.

Her side ached, but she forced herself to clamber past the lower cave

openings. With one last effort she reached the higher level and entered the next cave on her left. A ghostly sound in the dark stopped her in her tracks. Terrorized, she watched as a square shape appeared in the dimness of the cave. A light flashed, then vanished. Was her tired mind playing tricks? Or had her pursuers already overtaken her and blocked her path to the safety of the deep cave? She knew Allah must hate her. She gasped as a figure stepped out of the square box. With no hope or fight left in her, she fell to her knees. She lifted her trembling hands, pleading, "Let it be fast. Let it be over."

"Oh dear. Have we startled you?" The young man, whose hair was the color of sun-dried straw, bowed his head toward her. His smile lit up his face. "I am the Doctor, and may I introduce..." He turned and coughed apologetically. There was nothing but the blue box behind him. "I'm terribly sorry. Is there anything I can do for you?"

The gentle tone of his voice made Hayat look at him more closely. He was a tall man in a light jacket with a stalk of celery attached to his lapel. Question marks were embroidered on the collar of his shirt. She had never seen clothes quite like that, though she remembered once seeing a foreigner wearing similarly uncommon garments. A missionary, her father called him. They chased him from the village, telling him to take his outlandish teachings elsewhere. The stranger regarded her with concerned interest. His eyes radiated warmth, giving her hope.

"Hide me," she whispered.

The man stretched out his hand, leaning forward. "May I help you up?"

She shrank away from him. She couldn't possibly allow an infidel to touch her. Hastily, she pulled her veil over her head and heaved herself unaided off the ground, only to stare open-mouthed at the apparition that now brushed past the man. Allah had sent a djinni to deal with her.

"What's going on, Doctor?" The figure turned and faced Hayat. "Oh, I didn't see you. G'day, I'm Tegan."

Hayat's knees buckled as she realized this was not a djinni, but

instead a young woman. Appalled, she looked at the long bare legs sticking out of the tiny black skirt. She wore a skimpy white top covered in what looked like bright red squiggly headless worms that crawled all over her feminine shape. Her hair was uncovered and cropped short. Hayat couldn't speak, but automatically accepted Tegan's supporting arm and was led through the door of the blue box into a large and bright room.

"You need a rest, and I would say something to eat and a good drink will put you right in no time. Don't you agree, Doctor?"

"Ah, now, Tegan." The Doctor's hands came up. He stopped, embarrassed, and ended up scratching his fair hair.

The way the Doctor had pronounced the short sentence made Hayat turn. His face mirrored annoyance, frustration, or maybe worries. Obviously he didn't want her in this impossible box. He didn't agree with the woman's — Tegan's — spontaneity. Maybe, Hayat pondered, she should leave. She looked for the door and found none.

Her hands on her hips, Tegan stared at the Doctor. "Don't listen to him. I can see it in his eyes. He thinks I'm not appropriately dressed." The Doctor lifted his hands in silent defense. "I'm going," she snapped. On stepping into the corridor, she added, "Oh, and he has hang-ups about history and continuity and all that."

Hayat's face was blank. The words made no sense to her. She turned to the stranger, who called himself the Doctor, but when their eyes met, she looked away, as if his eyes could hurt her. Who was he? So mysterious, so alien. Shrinking, she pulled her veil tighter around herself, hiding in it, covering her fear and watching him. Why couldn't he stand still? "You don't want me here, do you?" she blurted out.

"What?" he flinched. "You are here now, so I..." He let the rest of the sentence die in his mouth. There, she had known it; he didn't want her here. He wouldn't help her. She was lost.

The Doctor bustled around the astonishing room with its white roundels covering the walls and the impractical table in the middle. He

pushed an armchair toward Hayat and indicated she could sit down.

She slumped down into the armchair. Terror, like a sickness, assaulted her. Everything slowed down as her whole body tightened and nausea overcame her. She had walked into a trap. Soon the men would come and she would be handed over to them. Why did she trust the strangers and follow them into this fantastic box? She pressed her hands to her face. Through her fingers she glanced at the Doctor.

"Are you all right?" he asked. His worried smile shone down at her, giving her hope.

Tegan, now wearing white trousers and a black satin jacket, returned and placed a tray of sandwiches on the armrest of Hayat's chair. Tegan grimaced at the Doctor as she pressed a hot drink into Hayat's hand.

"Ahm, where is Turlough?" The Doctor stepped from behind a hexagonal table that was covered with lights, switches and buttons and pretended to study a screen.

"He's sulking," Tegan answered flippantly. "He washed all his white socks, but switched on the washing machine before taking out my red T-shirt. He is now the proud owner of assorted pairs of pink socks. He is not amused and has locked himself in his room." Tegan's face darkened and she added, "Shouldn't we ask our guest a few questions?"

Nodding, the Doctor came to life and rubbed his hands with enthusiasm. He couldn't hide the inquisitive spark in his eyes when he pulled another chair close and settled down. "Do you feel like telling us what has happened to you?" Hayat sat up in her chair. What was there to lose? They could either punish her themselves or give her up to her village. Her life was in their hands. "I'm pregnant," she announced and stared at her dirty shoes sticking out of the wide, dark trousers she wore underneath several layers of skirts, blouses, over-shirts and the never missing black, thick veil.

"Wonderful. Congratulations." Tegan grinned and shook her hand. "Hey, even more reason for a hearty breakfast. Come on, tuck in." She pointed at the sandwiches. "That's cheese and tomatoes, and that one is

eggs and mayonnaise. Or would you prefer toast and marmalade?"

Perplexed, Hayat looked up and noticed a beam of pleasure shoot over the Doctor's features before his face turned to concern. "Is your husband pleased?" he asked with his soft voice. His deep eyes widened.

"I have no husband."

"Ah," the Doctor breathed, understanding. He jumped up, circled around his chair, sat down again, and clasped his hands together.

"So what?" Tegan wanted to know.

"Tegan, maybe we should let..." The Doctor looked questioningly at Hayat, and she whispered her name. "Ah, Hayat. That means life." He smiled. "Let Hayat tell her story."

" People condemn me. I am a sinner, yet I can't understand how I have sinned. I fear my lack of acceptance will anger Allah." Hayat hesitated, seeing how Tegan and the Doctor leaned forward to hear her low words. She inhaled deeply and tried to speak calmly and clearly. "It wasn't my fault."

She told them how she had visited her sister's family, as she had done for years. Chatting, they had sat in the yard, her tired twenty-two-year-old sister and the children. Tentatively, she had placed her hand on her sister's swelling stomach and laughed as the unborn fifth child's kick met her fingers. They had cooked and cleaned and dutifully covered their heads when her sister's husband arrived. They had served him his dinner and withdrawn.

When all had fallen asleep, she had been pulled from her bed and been taken into the yard. His face had come close to hers, and he had ordered her to keep still. His breath had a sour smell, and his groping hands had been rough.

There had been nothing she could do. He had beaten her when she struggled and boxed her mouth when she cried out. She had hidden in her room the next day, and when her sister had inquired, she had claimed she had run into the door in the night. Nobody had allowed her to go home. Her sister had been concerned about the bruising and hadn't

wanted to let her go before all was healed. And he had come again and again. “What could I have done?” she asked, finishing her story. “Well, for one, you could have—”

“That’ll do, Tegan” The Doctor shot out of his chair again and glared at his companion. Without another word he turned to Hayat. “Is there anyone you could turn to?” the Doctor asked. “Anywhere you could go?”

“Adi, my brother, is too far away and he Hayat stopped mid-sentence. “No.” She shook her head.

“Would you like us to come to the village and talk to your family?”

Hayat frowned. She suddenly felt so very exhausted. All her talk had been for nothing. Why had she hoped these strange people could help her, even save her? Why had she imagined they would whisk her away to some place where people allowed her to stand up for herself, where she wouldn’t be condemned, and where they would accept and, maybe, just maybe, even support her?

Disappointment crushed her as she realized the Doctor and Tegan didn’t understand, didn’t really understand. A shiver ran through her body. “They will kill me,” she murmured and let her head drop.

“We’ll see about that,” cried Tegan and joined the Doctor in front of Hayat’s chair. “We’ve dealt with worse situations. This should be a doddle, shouldn’t it, Doctor?”

“Stay here, Hayat.” The Doctor’s hand gently touched her shoulder. He pressed his lips together, stepping up to the contraption in the middle of the room before declaring, “Yes, we’ll be able to find a way to tackle this situation. Don’t you worry.” The Doctor nodded and smiled at her, while his hands played over the buttons on a thing Hayat couldn’t name.

Before they left, they gave her another cup of sweet and strong tea and showed her the box of biscuits. It was no good; her heart was heavy. How could she have involved these two friendly foreigners? They would naively trample into the village, and when the men found out they had helped her, anything could happen. She had to stop them. Desperately,

she stabbed the button she'd seen the Doctor depress. Promptly, the door behind her opened, and Hayat dashed from the box. Looking back, she couldn't quite believe what she saw. The box was preposterously small on the outside.

She hesitated and shook her head. There was no time to wonder and definitely no time to find an explanation.

She hurried over the arid plain, baked hard by the hot sunshine. Had she come the other way no more than six hours ago? Death still hung over her. Nothing was resolved. She heard the baying of the village hounds and hastened along the path toward her father's small holding at the edge of the settlement. There she spotted Tegan and the Doctor hiding behind the bushes next to one of the wells at the comer of the village square. Were the Doctor and Tegan courageous or just stupid?

She was about to call out, but when she saw the men standing in the square, arguing and holding back the hounds, she held her tongue. She tiptoed along fences and walls and finally ducked behind the huge water containers near the well, barely three meters away from Tegan and the Doctor's hiding place.

"Oh honestly, Doctor. Blow history," Tegan hissed. "You heard that bearded chap. He wants her dead. They won't even let her have her say. There is no one to defend her or stand by her. What kind of people are these?"

Hayat strained to hear all of Tegan's words, which nearly drowned in the constant baying of the dogs and the raised shouts of the village men. Cowering behind the well, she considered stealing away. Her peoples' hatred frightened her. But something held her back. She wanted to hear the Doctor's answer.

"They live by a different code of honor than your people. We have to try and accept their views. I think they are trying to do the right thing. Why else would they still argue so vehemently about Hayat's fate? Their lives are hard, but they are loyal people who look after each other and—"

"Of course you can find good in every society, but Doctor, this is an

emergency. Tell me, if a man would marry her, would she be safe?"

Hayat didn't see the Doctor's face but felt he had no answer. She understood he knew how inflexible some people were. But would he condemn them or blame her? She held her breath, listening.

"We can't just storm in there and stamp our ideas into them." The Doctor tried to soothe Tegan. "Change takes time."

" Yes, and many will die, not just Hayat," Tegan snapped. "Look at that bunch of indoctrinated men. They interpret their texts just as it suits them, pretending their way is the only right one."

"How do we know our interpretation is right?"

"Doctor, since when do you condone murder? There is nothing to make me accept that a raped girl is guilty." Tegan's voice rose with indignation. "Let's tell them who's guilty in this case."

"Shush, Tegan, shush." The Doctor pulled her deeper into the bushes. "We can't interfere."

"Oh, yeah? Watch me." Tegan pulled free of the Doctor's restraining hand, jumped up and strode openly toward the villagers and the barking dogs.

"No, Tegan, no!" Hayat cried, realizing too late that betraying her own presence jeopardized Tegan. She only wanted to stop Tegan from openly approaching the debating men, as this would insult them. Hayat ran, trying to overtake Tegan, but the Doctor loomed up in front of her. He didn't touch her; he didn't speak, but instinctively she stayed a step behind him and dared to trust him. She even dared to hope his presence would protect her.

The men grabbed Tegan, and all her ranting, screaming, wriggling and kicking didn't help her. Their steel-hard hands were clamped around her arms and legs. The Doctor's face twitched with agitation as he and Hayat slowly approached the group of village men. Hayat's father moved forward, ready to capture his own daughter, but the Doctor blocked his way and stretched out his hand. "Hello, I'm the Doctor." He smiled and quietly asked what Hayat was accused of.

Hayat held her breath. Did the Doctor really think he could convince them she was innocent and still worthy of life? Did the Doctor think she still had value, any value at all? Subconsciously, she had still hoped he had some door to Allah, who would send a signal to frighten the men and teach them a lesson. Suddenly, she laughed. She had really thought lightning or something would smite her sister's husband and he would confess his guilt. At least then he would be killed as well, and not just her. But here they stood, surrounded by all these proud men. The Doctor's supplications and expressive arm movements didn't help one little bit. They were bustled into a small cell in the village police house, and two men with dogs guarded the door.

At least the Doctor had gained them some time. Because of the two foreigners, judgment was postponed until the next morning. Depressed, Hayat turned away from her new friends and knelt down to pray. It was time she prepared herself for death.

"Just whose idea was it to go and waste our breath on these blockheads? Why didn't we just leave and take Hayat with us?" Tegan kicked the wall of the stone cell and hurt her toe. "Ow. I hate this place. I can't believe this is happening to us. Are you sure this is Earth in the late twentieth century, Doctor?" Frustrated, she sat down on the earthen ground. Outside, the sun sank behind the imposing mountains.

Soon it was dark, and all they could see was the huge fire the men had built in the middle of the square. Figures passed in front of the fire. Hayat heard their deep voices and knew they squabbled and argued, but couldn't make out what was said.

Hayat lost interest. She regretted having met the foreigners, regretted having confided in them, regretted that she had ever been bom. She wanted to forgive her people, but she couldn't. Did Allah really want her dead? With the back of her hand she wiped the single tear off her cheek and sighed. Would Allah forgive her for disbelieving his texts? Despair and anger mixed and flared up, only to vanish again, leaving her even emptier than before.

It was quiet outside. In the silence the Doctor asked, “Where does your brother live, Hayat?”

Why did the Doctor have to ask about Adi? Did he want to deepen her pain? Adi was far away in an unreal northern country. She so desperately wanted him to be here, to help her, to take her away from the village where nobody loved her. But Adi didn’t even know about her troubles. What would they tell him? Undoubtedly they would make up some tale. Maybe they would say she fell in the river and accidentally drowned. She pressed her trembling lips together before she managed to pronounce the strange-sounding names. “Croydon, London, in England.”

“Ah,” was all the Doctor said as he stared toward the fire.

Tegan threw tiny pebbles at the wall, restless and furious. “When do you get us out of here. Doctor?”

There was no answer.

It was Hayat who heard the tiny noise near the dogs. She heard the growl and the slobbering that followed and heard the hasty footsteps, recognizing them.

“Hayat, leave. Leave now,” her sister’s low voice insisted. “Mother and I chugged their tea, but it won’t hold for long. You must go.”

“Come with me, sister,” Hayat pleaded, suddenly afraid to go out into the world all alone. Tears stung her eyes as the Doctor took her hand that still clung to her sister’s arm. Gently, he guided her from the cell, nodded to her sister, and silently they walked out of the village. “I want to die,” Hayat breathed.

“Oh, surely not.” Tegan dismissed Hayat’s desire with a brusque gesture. “Think of your baby.”

“How shall I look after it? How shall I feed it?” Hayat looked back at the village, trying to catch a last glimpse of her sister, but the night had swallowed the landscape, the village and the amber of the fire. A waking hound howled his protest into the night, making her jump.

“Better run!” the Doctor shouted, and they took to their heels.

The Doctor didn't let go of Hayat's hand until they were back inside the blue box. There, he fiddled around with levers and pressed buttons. An eerie sound filled the air. She saw the Doctor smile at someone wearing light pink socks. It was a young man, who asked if he had missed something, but she was too weary to worry. She plopped into the armchair. Her eyes drooped. She would just rest for a minute or two before asking her rescuers to leave her and make their escape. Just a few...

"When did you know?" Hayat heard the woman's voice before she remembered that she sat in an impossible box, resting. She sighed and was about to heave herself out of the chair when the Doctor's answer came and she hesitated. "When Hayat told me Adi lives in Croydon."

"Oh, is that such a great revelation that you conveniently ignore timelines, history and whatever fluctuations?" a young man's voice sneered.

"I recalled something Sarah Jane told me. Bushra." The Doctor paused before adding breathlessly, "That means good omen, by the way." He stopped talking, and Hayat wondered if he expected a comment. Finally, he carried on. "Sarah said Bushra was the friendliest general practitioner they ever had in the area. She was definitely discreet when I needed Sarah to take an outlandish friend of mine to have a wound stitched up." The Doctor breathed in and added, "Sarah said she had watched Bushra grow up as she helped her mother keep order in her Uncle Adi's surgery."

"So?" Tegan said. "It's still a bit vague for you to—" Hayat had forgotten about the sandwich tray balanced on the armrest of her chair, and when she was leaning forward trying to catch every word of the conversation, she nudged it, sending it clattering to the floor.

"Ah, dear Hayat. We have arrived." The Doctor beamed at her. Through the opening door, Hayat saw a gray road lined with endless rows of cars and houses, covered by a gray sky. She looked into the Doctor's eyes, knowing Bushra, her little girl, would go to school and

learn to stand up for herself. One day they would travel back to her home country, and they would help to educate her people, making sure women in trouble would no longer be murdered. She pressed her hand to her stomach. One day, she would show Tegan.

RAISIN JACK AND THE DEAD GANG

BY CHRIS HEFFERNAN

The Sun was nearly below the hilltops. Joyner yawned and rubbed his eyes with his free hand. The coach rocked slowly along on the uneven road. He had hoped to arrive in Bodie before sunset, but he hoped for a lot of things and was used to disappointment. He was tired, the horses were tired, and Hanson was sleeping beside him.

Joyner watched Peel riding ahead of the coach. Peel's back was straight, his body stiff, never a hair out of place. Officer Peel of the Treasury Department. Even his damned horse appeared none the worse for wear. His orders were to escort the shipment from Montgomery City to Bodie.

Supposedly, he was a dead shot and an experienced lawman, but Joyner thought he was kind of prissy. He had figured the shipment was worth something, but the fact that the bankers who owned it had gotten the Treasury Department involved meant it was probably worth something a little more. This had made Joyner very uneasy for most of the trip. The trek had been uneventful, however, and Joyner was beginning to relax.

Peel led the coach along the bumpy road into the hills. Just a few miles more, and Joyner would be kicking his heels at the Wheaton & Hollis. Joyner allowed a smile to creep across his face, and he even began to whistle a little tune. Beside him, Hanson snorted in his sleep.

Peel had suddenly stopped on the road ahead, and Joyner had to rein

in his kiddies hard to avoid running them into him.

"What in the name of Lucifer are you doing, Peel?" Joyner yelled out at the Treasury man.

Peel held up a hand to silence Joyner. Joyner huffed and began cooing to the horses. Hanson woke up and looked around.

"Are we there?" he asked. Joyner motioned to him to be quiet.

The horses were nervous. Joyner looked around the hills on either side of the road. They were in a small pass, the rocky hills moving up steeply to either side. Dead shrubs and trees sprouted here and there amongst the stones. Joyner squinted as he looked from side to side; his eyesight wasn't that good, especially at dusk. The dipping sun cast an eerie glow into the pass, as if they were in the center of a ring of fire. Joyner looked at Hanson and shrugged. Hanson had a shotgun cradled in his arms. He held it at the ready.

"Something's not—" Peel said, and a shot rang out. Peel was struck and flew out of his saddle. He landed hard on the road. Joyner stood from his seat and looked down at the Treasury Man. Even with his bad eyesight, he could see the gaping hole between Peel's eyes.

Hanson was up to his feet as well. They both looked up as three horses pounded out of the hills a few hundred feet up the road.

"No, no, no," Joyner said. "This ain't happening..."

Hanson aimed his shotgun and waited as the horses thundered on toward the coach. Joyner didn't plan on waiting around. With a yell, he got his kiddies up and running, and they began to pull the coach along the road toward the oncoming bandits. There was no room in the narrow pass to turn around, so Joyner was going to run through them. Hanson hung on for dear life, trying to keep his aim up.

Shots rang out, and smoke filled the air. Joyner felt a tug on the reins as his horses fell to the ground and the coach skidded along the road. Hanson was thrown clear. Joyner hung on for dear life as the coach slid at an angle. He waited for the coach to finally come to a rest. He drew his pistol and jumped off the coach, grimacing as he landed on his knees.

Joyner heard Hanson's shotgun fire. He caught a glimpse of his partner a few feet behind him, trying to reload his weapon. More shots rang out, and through the smoke Joyner could see Hanson go down.

Three) ifigures appeared through the smoke and dust. Everything seemed to be moving so slowly. He could hear the death throes of his kiddies, but he couldn't see them. Through the tears in his eyes, Joyner could see the figures approach. The dust seemed to part for them as they walked through it. To him, they seemed like demons coming for his soul. He dropped his gun.

"Who are you?" he stammered. "What do you want?"

Two of the figures walked past Joyner and went up into the coach. The third stared down at him. He had a bandanna across his nose and mouth, so Joyner could only see his dark eyes.

"The name's Jack," the figure said

Joyner's mouth dropped open. "No," he whispered. "It can't be."

The other two figures lifted a locked chest out of the coach. Joyner strained his neck to see, but he couldn't make out any details. The light seemed to die on them, as if they were made of shadow.

"And that's what we want," Jack said.

Joyner turned his attention back to Jack. "What is that thing?" Joyner asked, indicating the chest as the two figures carried it away into the dust.

Jack looked back at him. "If I told you that," he said, pointing his pistol directly at Joyner's face, and pulling back the hammer with a thunderously silent click, "then I'd have to kill you."

Jack's finger slowly pressed the trigger. The hammer began to move. Joyner passed out.

* * *

"Hello...?" Clyde Williams stumbled on the loose rocks in the dark. He stubbed his toe on one of the larger stones for a third time. He held his

lantern out in front of him, but it didn't cast much light. Where it did illuminate, it created monstrous shadows.

"Shooter?" he called out softly. The familiar sound of boots crunching soft rock caused Williams to freeze in his tracks. The lantern wavered in his outstretched hand. "It's Williams," he said, his voice faltering slightly. A man stepped from the shadows into the light of the lantern, a pistol in his hand. Williams breathed a sigh of relief and relaxed his arm. "Damn, Shooter. You scared the hell out of me."

Shooter McGrath smiled and put his pistol back in its holster. He whistled. Two men came out of the shadows and lit up a campfire. Williams realized he had stumbled into the middle of their camp without even knowing it. He could now see their horses not thirty feet away, and he was practically standing in their fire pit. He backed away as the flames grew.

"How'd it go?" Williams asked. "Did you get it?"

"'Course" Shooter said, pushing some tobacco into his mouth.

"You got it?" Williams stammered, his eyes starting to twitch. "Where is it?"

McGrath signaled to one of his comrades, and the man lugged a small chest into the light of the campfire. Williams was quickly on his knees in front of the coffer. He removed a key and placed it into the small lock. With trembling hands he slowly opened the lid. A ray of soft green light emanated from the chest, engulfing Williams' face. The wind seemed to pick up slightly. The echoes it made as it passed through the rocks sounded like the cries of a hundred lost souls.

"So, is that what you wanted?" Shooter asked.

"Oh yes," Williams said, slowly lowering the lid and replacing the lock. He took a moment to ease his excitement before standing. He removed a small pouch from inside his vest and handed it to Shooter.

Shooter took the pouch and quickly checked the contents. He nodded to his companions, and one of them let out a small whoop.

"You left Joyner alive?" Williams asked, dusting his pants.

"Yup, although I still ain't sure why." Shooter put the pouch into his belt. "And one of 'em was a Treasury Officer."

Williams smiled. "Never fear, my good friend. It's all coming together." Williams hefted the chest and carried it out into the night. Shooter watched him go. One of his comrades came to stand beside him.

"What if his partners find out he crossed 'em?" he asked.

Shooter chewed the tobacco thoughtfully. "Won't matter. We'll be long gone."

* * *

The early morning sun was just beginning to shed its light on the land. The running water of a creek could be heard off in the distance. Shooter's men were packing up their camp and making ready to leave. They had some money now, and they had a few more jobs awaiting them up north.

Shooter was loading the last of his saddlebags onto his horse when he heard the first whistle. He thought it was just a bird call, but after the second and third soundings he knew it came from the lips of a man.

Shooter's comrades had heard it too, and all three of them stood around their horses, pistols drawn. For a long moment nothing stirred. The sound of the creek suddenly became an annoyance as they tried to find the direction from which the whistle had come.

"There!" one of them shouted as the silhouette of a man stood up on a rock face, his back to the sun. Shooter could just make out a string of feathers around the man's neck rustling in the breeze. One of Shooter's men raised his pistol toward the figure.

"Now, now" a voice called out. "That's not playing nice. Didn't your mother teach you manners?"

Shooter saw another man appear as if out of the rays of the sun itself. His wavy black locks hung over his eyes. The man had a long pistol holstered on his belt, and his fancy clothes rustled in the breeze.

"Who the hell are you?" Shooter asked, keeping his gun trained on

the fancy man.

"Name's Robert Rollins, but everyone calls me Beautiful Bobby."

There was a pause; then Shooter laughed. "Yeah, right."

Shooter lifted his pistol and shot. The bullet passed through nothing, ricocheting off a nearby rock. Shooter spun around, looking for the man who was suddenly not standing where he had been.

That's impossible, Shooter thought. *There's no way he moved that fast.*

He continued to spin, scanning the area for any sign of Beautiful Bobby. He turned his gaze to the man with the feathers on top of the hill.

"Kill him!" he yelled at his mates, pointing at the man on the ridge.

They opened fire, but the man jumped and landed on the side of the rock face. He continued to run around the hill, his body at a ninety-degree angle to the ground, somehow defying gravity. Shooter's men kept firing, but the man was too quick, and by now they were scared out of their wits.

"What the hell is going on?" Shooter whispered, and then shouted, "Behind you!"

Bobby had reappeared out of thin air directly behind one of his men. He had a long pistol in his hand. With lightning speed he placed it behind the man's head and fired. The lifeless body fell to the ground.

Shooter watched as the man with the feathers jumped off the rock face. He flew into the air over Shooter's remaining companion and landed beside him. He had two knives in his hands and made short work of the bandit. As he turned, Shooter could see that the man with the knives had some Indian blood in him.

Shooter held his pistol toward the two and backed away. They held their ground. All was suddenly quiet. The sound of the creek was now ominous and seemed misplaced in the presence of such violence.

"I'm just gonna walk outta here..." he was saying, when he backed into something.

He turned and was knocked to the ground, his pistol sliding out of reach. Shooter squinted up into the sun and held a hand to his face to

shield his eyes. A figure walked in front of the sun, covering Shooter in shadow. The figure held a pistol toward Shooter and went down to one knee. His face was horribly burned and he brought it within an inch of Shooter's.

"What do you want?" Shooter babbled.

"I just want what's mine," the burned man said. His breath smelled of the dead. "You took it in my name. I want it."

"In your name...?" Shooter looked into the burnt face. "No, you ain't real!" Shooter tried to squirm away, but the man held him down. "I don't have it anymore. The banker! The damn banker took it!"

The burned man stood up and stared into the rising sun. "Why do you want it? What is it?" Shooter asked, his voice cracking.

The man looked down at him. "Now if I told you that," he said, "I'd have to kill you."

The man smiled, his burnt skin wrinkling around the eyes and where his lips should be. Bobby and the Indian began to chuckle. Shooter started to smile, and then he too was laughing. Then the man put a bullet through Shooter's heart.

* * *

WANTED

For the MURDER of an Officer of the US Government,
and THEFT of Private Property.

Raisin Jack Murty $500
Beautiful Bobby Rollins $250
Singing Crow Tullis $250

Dead or Alive.

* * *

Sheriff Gimble shook his head at the notice. More trouble. Gimble had been sheriff of Bodie ever since moving to California nearly a year ago, and he hadn't had more than a few days rest in between the manhunts, lynch mobs, bank robbery attempts, shootouts and all manner of crime in between. He was a well-educated man and lived for the days when he was allowed to sit in his chair on his stoop and read Milton or Hawthorne.

Today was not such a day.

He walked across Green Street past the Post Office, past Mrs. Van Ulden and Mrs. Steele, who smiled politely at him, past three children trying to get a glance inside the undertaker's shop (they ran off when he asked them what they were doing), and stopped just outside the Wheaton & Hollis tavern and hotel.

Word had gone out by paper, voice and telegraph. New faces had started showing up in town even before the ink was dry on the notices. Bounty hunters mostly, but a few thrillseekers and writers as well. All wanted to be the next big thing in Bodie. Bring in Raisin Jack and his Dead Gang. Sheriff Gimble was damn well going to make sure things didn't get out of hand on his watch.

He entered the Wheaton & Hollis. The place was bustling with activity. On a normal mid-afternoon, the downstairs tavern would be virtually empty. Today it was filled with easily two dozen people. Charlie was on the piano, something he didn't normally do until late evening. Spirits were being poured freely, and voices filled the air.

Gimble walked slowly through the saloon, moving from table to table, taking in the faces. He recognized most of them. Jimmy "The Rattlesnake" Riker, a bounty hunter from Texas, was chatting up a local at the bar. Red Michaels sat at a table with his personal biographer, whose named escaped Gimble at the moment. The writer was a rather pudgy man who couldn't hold his liquor. Andrew Markham. Jolly John

Philbin. Gimble wasn't sure, but the young lad might be Dave Rudabaugh. Lady Maria stood on the staircase and winked at Gimble. He tipped his hat to her. The sheriff passed by the others, nodding to a few. Charlie started playing an Irish tune.

He stopped by a table in the comer at which a lone man was seated. The odd little man wore a white suit and hat and was leaning forward on his umbrella, his chin resting on his hands. He was staring at a pocket watch that sat open on the table. An untouched mug of ale sat beside the watch. Gimble sat down across from the man.

"Hello, sheriff," the man said without looking up.

Gimble looked down at the watch and noticed a number of dials and hands spinning and whirring on the face. "Do I know you?" he asked. The little man looked up, a smile on his face. The man looked very tired and Gimble noticed that the smile didn't extend to his eyes.

"No," the man said. "I don't think so. I'm the Doctor." The Doctor closed his watch and placed it in a pocket. "Sheriff Gimble," the Doctor went on, "you're just the man I wanted to see."

* * *

Joyner gulped down another swig of whiskey. He ignored the few drops that escaped his mouth and ran down his chin on to his dirty shirt. He stared through the crack in his door at the sheriff and the strange man that was with him.

"Who's that with ya?" Joyner asked, indicating the Doctor with his rifle barrel.

"He's the Doctor," Gimble said. "It's all right; he's a friend. We want to talk to you about Jack Murty."

Joyner lowered the rifle and blinked. The door slammed shut. They heard the sliding and clicking of locks. The door opened and Joyner beckoned for the sheriff and the Doctor to come in. He quickly locked the door again when they were inside.

Gimble wrinkled his nose. It smelled like something had died in there recently. From the look of old Joyner, he hadn't bathed or sobered up since the robbery.

Joyner placed his rifle between empty whiskey bottles on the table and sat down hard on a chair. He motioned lazily for the Doctor and Gimble to join him, although there were no other chairs in sight. Gimble leaned against the wall, but the Doctor remained standing in the middle of the room, his umbrella hooked on his jacket pocket, his eyes fixed on Joyner.

"Mr. Joyner," the Doctor began after a moment of silence and cued by a belch from Joyner. "Sheriff Gimble tells me you were attacked and robbed by an outlaw called Jack Murty and his gang."

Joyner nodded, his greasy hair hanging in his eyes.

"And they killed Mr. Peel..."

Joyner nodded again.

"Are you sure it was Jack Murty?"

Joyner finally looked up at the Doctor with bloodshot eyes. "He came out of the dust. He had his gang with him. And he told me his name."

The Doctor moved in closer to Joyner. "I see," he said. "It's just that I thought Jack Murty was killed seven years ago. He and his gang were finally caught up in the mountains of Bodie by a group of vigilantes and he was beaten, stabbed, shot and then burned to death." The Doctor had been moving closer and closer to Joyner, and when the man suddenly burst into laughter the Doctor jumped in surprise.

"Yup, that's what the stories say alright," Joyner said. "But there are other stories, Doctor. Stories that say the lynch mob didn't do such a good job on Jack. Some say the fire didn't kill him... A horribly burned man haunting the hills of Bodie. Some stories tell of Raisin Jack and his Dead Gang coming back to life to get revenge on those who killed him. I saw his eyes! Raisin Jack has come out of the dust and his Dead Gang rides again!"

Joyner was literally frothing at the mouth and he only stopped

laughing so he could down another few mouthfuls of whiskey. He giggled at the Doctor and Gimble as he cracked open another bottle. Gimble took the Doctor's arm and lead him out of Joyner's small home.

"How you gonna kill a ghost, sheriff?" they heard Joyner cackle as they closed the door behind them.

"Raving lunatic, I'm afraid," Gimble said.

"Raving, yes," the Doctor agreed. "But I think there may be some truth to his lunacy."

"Don't tell me you believe all this ghost nonsense?"

" Ghosts? Never. But sometimes death is not the be all and end all." The Doctor looked off into the distance. "'Death, be not proud...'"

"John Donne," Gimble said. "1609."

The Doctor stopped and looked at Gimble as if he didn't know what he was talking about. *"Mordred Conceived,* 2017," the Doctor said, and was off again before Gimble could ask him what he meant.

* * *

"Good night, Mr. Clark."

"Good night, Martha." Clark finished locking up the bank, walked out onto Union Street and began to make his way home. It was an unusually chilly night, and he was looking forward to getting home to his wife and warm bed, He pulled the collar of his suit jacket close around Ins neck and crossed the street. He could hear muffled music as he passed the Wheaton & Hollis and made his way across town.

As he strolled past Prospect Street, a small wind picked up. The dust from the street blew up into Clark's face, and he had to shield his eyes with his hands. The dust got into his nose, and he went into a sneezing fit as he ducked into a doorway. When his eyes finally stopped watering, he made his way back out onto the street, making an extra effort to protect his face from the dust, which was still swirling and blowing.

A bird call caused him to stop and look up. A crow was flying just

above him. At first, Clark thought the wretched thing had gotten caught up in the miniature sandstorm, but he soon came to realize that it was actually riding the gusts. It seemed completely unfazed by the biting wind, and it held its position perfectly as the sand blew around it. With a quick beat of its wings, it swooped down toward him and he had to duck to avoid being hit. The crow turned and descended on him again, slower this time. The wind seemed to die down. Dust still filled the air, but it was hanging in a lazy sort of way. As the crow came in to land, it began to grow. The body of the bird gave way to a humanoid shape. By the time it was on the ground, it was fully human.

Clark gave a quick yelp and began to back away from the thing that approached him. Part of his mind told him that the crow had changed into an Indian; the other part was yelling at him to flee. The Indian had drawn a knife and was slowly walking toward Clark, a stoic expression on his tanned face.

Clark looked around, but there was no one else on the street. He turned and fled north, up Prospect. He wanted to yell out for help, but his voice had caught in his throat. All he could think of was getting away as quickly as possible.

The dust storm picked up again, and Clark barely spotted a figure standing in the middle of the road in front of him, blocking his escape. The man was dressed in a dirty black jacket and breeches, and had a six-shooter holstered on each leg. His head was tilted down so that the rim of his black hat hid his features.

Clark stopped a few feet from the man and quickly looked behind him. The Indian was nowhere in sight. He felt a spark of relief. Maybe he was simply tired. Perhaps the sand that had blown into his eyes caused him to see things. The coach robbery and the ensuing hysteria of the townsfolk had taken its toll on him. He was smiling when he turned back to the man.

He froze.

The man had lifted his gaze to Clark. His face was scarred with bums.

"You," Clark whispered.

"I want what's mine," Raisin Jack said.

"What are you talking about?" Clark stammered.

"The Relic," Jack stated.

"But, but," Clark was shaking. "But you took it..."

Jack growled. He bared his teeth, tilted his head back and yelled into the night. He drew his pistols and fired. Clark was struck and stumbled backwards from each shot. Jack twirled the pistols in the air and replaced them in their holsters as Clark fell on to the dusty road. By the time the echoes died, Jack was gone.

* * *

The Doctor stood on the road and stared up at the body that was pinned to the outside wall of the shop. According to Sheriff Gimble, it was the body of the banker, Josiah Clark. The man had been riddled with gunfire and then tacked up to the wall using railroad spikes. The shopkeeper's poor wife had made the gruesome discovery. The Doctor could still hear her muffled sobs inside the shop. A message had been scrawled in Clark's blood underneath the body: *I want what's mine*.

"Word just got out," Gimble said, walking away from one of his deputies and approaching the Doctor. "A posse is gathering. They're going into the hills to find Jack."

The Doctor frowned. "Hmm," he said.

Gimble joined the Doctor in staring at the body. "Are you done?"

"Yes," the Doctor said quietly. Gimble motioned to a couple of his men and they began to remove the spikes and take Clark's body down.

"Having a spot of trouble, sheriff?"

Gimble turned.

"I had a feeling you'd show up, Nine," Gimble said, shaking the man's hand.

Nine wore a brown poncho and was a tower of a man. His small hat

looked out of place on his rather large frame, but no one was brave enough to make any jokes about it, let alone talk to him about the aesthetics. A mean-looking scar ran from the comer of his left eye to the base of his neck.

"Yeah," Nine said. "Bodie has this way of dragging you back again and again. Looks like someone's been having some fun." Nine watched the body of Clark being placed into a box and put in the back of a wagon. His gaze turned to the message.

"What do you think he's after?" Nine asked.

"What's his," the Doctor said, continuing to stare at the wall.

Nine looked down at the little man. "And what's that?" Nine asked, but the Doctor didn't answer. "Doesn't really matter, I guess. He and his boys are worth $1,000, and I aim to collect. This time they'll be put down for good.

"Yes," the Doctor said, barely audible.

Nine shook his head. Gimble just shrugged.

"Well, I'm gonna see what that posse's up to. I'll see ya around, sheriff." Nine left Gimble and the Doctor alone in front of the shop.

"Friend of yours?" the Doctor asked.

"Yeah. Used to be my best deputy."

The Doctor nodded. Gimble noticed that the Doctor had some sort of object in his hand. He had no idea what it was, and based on the way the Doctor was looking at it, Gimble decided not to ask. The device made a couple of bleeping noises, and then the Doctor put it into one of his pockets.

"Something strange is happening here, and I don't like it one bit." The Doctor finally took his gaze from the wall and turned to the sheriff, a curious look on his face. "Did you call him 'Nine?'"

It took a moment for Gimble to realize the Doctor had changed topics. "Yeah," he answered. "It's how many times he's been shot."

The Doctor's eyebrows went up. "I see."

* * *

The town of Bodie was bustling with activity over the next few days. The posse of towns-people-tumed-vigilantes had spent a good number of hours scouring the hills outside of the town, but found nothing. They soon returned and went about their business.

More bounty hunters arrived, each of them with their own plans for capturing the elusive Raisin Jack. Gimble's deputies kept an uneasy peace on the streets. For the most part, the locals stayed inside after dark. The legend of Raisin Jack and the Dead Gang grew tenfold in a few short days.

* * *

George Tarrant was still in shock. His partner of eleven years had been murdered a few days ago for no apparent reason whatsoever. The authorities were at a loss. There was a murderer loose in Bodie, and he had killed Josiah Clark in cold blood. Tarrant had just finished taking care of Clark's affairs and was heading home. To make matters worse, Tarrant's other partner, Clyde Williams, had not been seen for a number of days. The business was in a state of disarray.

Tarrant arrived at his modest home and walked up the stairs of his porch. The wood creaked under his boots in that familiar, soothing way, but he didn't notice it. His mind was still so cluttered with thoughts of Josiah's death that he also didn't realize his door was unlocked until he had pushed it open and let himself in. He looked back at the door and then toward the interior of the house.

"Julia?" he called out. There was no response. Tarrant wandered down the foyer toward the kitchen. He paused to pick up a potted plant that had tipped over on a hallway table. He walked through the archway that led to the kitchen, expecting the smell of beans and stew, but the kitchen was *empty. He went back to the foyer* and looked upstairs.

“Julia?” he called out again. “Phillip?” Slowly, Tarrant made his way up the stairs. It was possible they had gone over to the O’Malley’s; it wouldn’t have been the first time. But Julia usually left a note for him in the kitchen.

At the top of the stairs, Tarrant heard a noise from his son’s bedroom, a muffled bump. Phillip was probably in his room reading a book, or even asleep as it was quite late. He decided to check on his son. If he was awake, he may know where his mother had gone. Tarrant carefully opened the bedroom door in case he was in fact asleep.

In that first moment, Tarrant noticed a number of things. Phillip was sitting on his bed. A man was sitting there with him. The man had a gun to Phillip’s temple. Tarrant was also vaguely aware of an unnatural chill in the air and of another presence in the room, but he was too worried for his son to be able to focus.

Tarrant let out a yell and dove at the man on the bed with his son. Something hit him from behind before he made it to the bed, and he fell to the floor.

On the street outside the Tarrant home, the wind had picked up. Dust and sand from the road flailed against the front door. A loose window shutter flapped against the side of the house. The noise it made sounded like gunfire. Then all was quiet.

A man appeared on the street as the three figures emerged from the house. Jimmy The Rattlesnake’ Riker had noticed the group enter the home, and then moments later watched as the banker Tarrant had arrived. At first, he had considered warning Tarrant, but that may have given his prey time for a surreptitious exit. If the life of a banker and his family meant money in his pocket, Riker would not object.

Riker leveled his shotgun and fired at the trio before they could react. Singing Crow Tullis was hit square in the chest and flew back against the wall of the house. He slid down in a heap.

“Nice shootin’,” Beautiful Bobby said as Riker walked out into the open.

"You're next," Riker said, and took aim at Bobby, who just stood there with his arms crossed and a smile on his face. That was when Tullis began to move. Riker spotted it out of the comer of his eye. He thought it was just the dark playing tricks. Bobby smiled. Riker kept the shotgun steady, but adjusted his gaze slightly to Tullis. The Indian was standing again, no wound on his chest. Riker gaped. *I hit him*, Riker thought. *I know I hit him!*

"My turn," Bobby said, drawing his pistol. The partial moonlight glinted off the long barrel. Bobby fired two shots into the ground at Riker's feet. Riker jumped and dropped his shotgun. The echoes from the ricochets died some distance off in the night. Bobby fired again, and again Riker jumped on the spot to dodge the bullets.

"Dance!" Bobby laughed and emptied his pistol into the dirt road at Riker's feet. Bobby continued to pull the trigger. Click-Click-Click.

Bobby cursed and began to reload. Riker was nearly crying as he turned and fled. Bobby feverishly tried to reload and run after Riker at the same time, but Raisin Jack put a hand on his shoulder.

"He ain't worth it," Jack said. "Come on, we have other business to take care of."

Bobby hesitated, but then laughed and replaced his pistol in its holster. He helped Tullis dust himself off as they walked down the street. Raisin Jack began to follow, but then stopped suddenly. He turned slowly and looked across the street. For a second, he could have sworn he saw a short figure in white between two of the buildings. His gaze lingered for a moment before he turned and followed his gang into the night.

* * *

"Going somewhere, Mr. Williams?"

Williams jumped. The bag he was carrying fell to the ground. He quickly picked it up and placed it on top of the other items in the small

wagon. He turned to face the man who had stepped out from beside the old bam. The man wore a white hat and jacket and didn't seem to be armed other than the umbrella he was carrying.

"As a matter of fact, I am," Williams said. "Now if you'll excuse me, mister—"

"Doctor," the man said, raising his hat.

"Whoever you are, this is private property. I could have you shot, you know. Good day to you, sir."

"Not a very good day,'' the Doctor said. "It seems someone is hunting down your partners. It doesn't take a very intelligent man to see that they'll be coming after you next. But then you already know that, don't you? That's why you've been hiding out at this abandoned farm. That's why you're in such a hurry now, isn't it?"

Williams rounded on the Doctor. "Listen here. I don't see how my business is any of your concern—"

"But it is my concern." The Doctor didn't back down. Williams wilted slightly under the small man's gaze. "Unnatural occurrences are afoot in Bodie, Mr. Williams, and you are at the very heart of the matter."

"Bah!" Williams said with a hint of worry, returning to the wagon. "I have no time for ghost stories."

"Ghost stories that you started," the Doctor said.

Williams froze. Who was this man? How did he know these things? Shooter. Shooter must have talked!

"I don't know what you're talking about," Williams said without turning around. He slowly began reaching inside his vest.

"Robbing your own partners and spreading nasty rumors about dead outlaws is one thing," the Doctor was saying. "But allowing all these people to die and only being concerned for your own welfare is unforgivable."

Williams wrapped his hand around the grip of a small pistol. How did this Doctor know all this? No matter. He was prepared to do what he had to. Williams spun around and raised the pistol toward the Doctor.

The Doctor moved quicker than Williams anticipated, and something hard struck him in the wrist. The pistol dropped out of his grasp and fell out of reach. The handle of the Doctor's umbrella was clamped around Williams' wrist, and the Doctor held him firm.

"Yes, what would be one more death?" The Doctor was furious. He looked at the pistol lying in the dirt and then to Williams. Williams was held firm by the Doctor's surprising strength and his dark eyes. "And another, and another? You may flee, Mr. Williams, but you cannot escape what is out there — that thing to which your actions gave birth."

"I don't know what you're talking about," Williams whimpered.

"No, you don't, do you?" the Doctor scowled. "You don't even know what it is that you have. All you know is that you want it, at all costs. But look at the cost, Mr. Williams. That Relic you covet is the very thing that has brought about all this destruction, and it will bring about your own death."

"No," Williams broke down. "I don't know what you mean."

"The Dead Gang are in Bodie."

"That's impossible!" Williams cried. "I made it up. Jack Murty is dead. I was part of the posse that killed him seven years ago. I was there. I know he's dead! There were rumors that said he was still alive, so I made up that story to throw people off."

The Doctor sighed. "Jack Murty is dead. But now, Raisin Jack has been born of the hysteria that you created — the psychic energy of the hysteria amplified by that Relic. And he has one purpose; the purpose that you gave him. To get what is his. To steal the Relic."

Williams' head shook in a series of sobs. "No."

"Give me the Relic," the Doctor said softly. "End this." Williams met the Doctor's gaze. The smothering wisdom emanating from behind the Doctor's eyes broke the last of his will. He nodded. The Doctor loosened his grip and Williams reached inside his jacket and removed a small item wrapped in a gray cloth. He handed it to the Doctor.

The Doctor opened the cloth. A green light shone from within,

lighting up the Doctor's face. He closed the cloth and placed the Relic in his pocket. He turned to leave.

"I didn't know..." Williams said.

The Doctor paused for a moment. "No," he said to the air. "They invariably don't." He turned back and watched Williams get on the wagon and ride away.

"Nice work, Doc," a voice called out.

The Doctor looked up and saw Nine approaching from a copse of dead trees, armed. The Doctor tipped his hat.

"I really liked that bit with the umbrella. But don't think about trying something like that with me."

"I wouldn't dream of it," the Doctor said. "Let me guess, you're here to rob me?"

"Just want that Relic thing. If it'll really lure Raisin Jack in, then that's something I gotta have." Nine stopped a few feet from the Doctor. He towered over the little man. The Doctor looked up into Nine's face with a glare that was part condescension, part impatience.

"We don't have time for this!" the Doctor huffed. "If you were really listening, you'd know that Raisin Jack cannot be harmed by normal means. He's not natural."

Nine snickered. "Mumbo jumbo." He cocked the hammer of the pistol. "The Relic..."

"You'd better put that gun down or people are going to have to start calling you 'Ten.'" came a voice, seemingly from nowhere.

"Sheriff," the Doctor said. "Are you waiting for the most dramatically opportune moment?"

Sheriff Gimble stepped out from beside the bam. His pistol was drawn, and it was pointed at the bounty hunter. He walked across the front yard of the old farmhouse and stopped beside the Doctor.

"You didn't seem too worried," he said. "All right, Nine. You don't realize it, but I just saved your hide. I suggest you take a trip away from Bodie, and I wouldn't advise coming back for a while."

Nine paused. He weighed his options and for a moment it looked like he was going to test the sheriff. Then he smiled. “Sure thing, sheriff,” he said, placing his pistol back in its holster under his poncho. “No skin off my teeth. There are bigger fish out there anyway.”

Nine walked back toward the copse, where his horse waited, and climbed into the saddle. He trotted over and looked down at the Doctor. “I’ll be seeing you around.”

“Have an apartment on Menaxus, do you?”

Nine shook his head. He spurred his horse and thundered off toward the hills. The Doctor and Gimble waited for Nine to ride off before walking back toward the town. It was getting close to sunset, and a cool wind was blowing.

“What now, Doctor?”

“As I told Mr. Williams,” the Doctor said, “it’s time I ended this.”

“How?” Gimble asked, quickening his pace to keep up with the small man. “What is that... Relic?”

“Something that shouldn’t be here,” the Doctor stated. “It gave form to Raisin Jack, and it can take that form away. Jack needs to complete a task, and I’m going to help him do it.”

“ Why not just destroy it?” Gimble asked.

“Because I’m not sure what that would do,” the Doctor answered. “And I should return it to its rightful place when this is all over.”

“Where is its rightful place?

“No need to concern yourself with that,” the Doctor said. “You just make sure no more of those bounty hunters get in my way.”

* * *

Most of the doors were bolted, and most of the windows were shut. A few remained open a crack as townsfolk kept watch over the street. The air was thick with anticipation. Time slowed to a near standstill. They waited. They watched.

The Doctor walked out into the middle of the street. A wind picked up, blowing the Doctor's hat off his head and rolling it away. The Doctor stood his ground. Dust filled the air. Raisin Jack and the Dead Gang were standing on the street as well. The two parties stood a mere twenty paces apart, staring each other down.

Raisin Jack stood in between Singing Crow Tullis and Beautiful Bobby. The three outlaws stared at the Doctor. The Doctor stared back. The wind whistled its lament as it blew across the street.

Jack's burnt and wrinkled fingers brushed lightly against the grips of his holstered pistols. The Doctor's grip tightened around the handle of his umbrella. Not a soul moved. The town waited. On one side of the street, Sheriff Gimble held on to a rifle and watched.

With a quick movement, the Doctor went for something inside his jacket. A gasp sounded from one of the buildings. Jack drew his pistols out with the same speed and pointed them at the Doctor. He did not fire when he saw what the Doctor held in his hand.

"Looking for this?" the Doctor called out. He unwrapped the cloth and tossed the Relic to the ground half the distance to Raisin Jack. The object glowed with a green light, obscuring its dimensions. "You can have it."

Beautiful Bobby let out a yelp of joy. He and Singing Crow ran over toward the Relic. Raisin Jack looked at the Relic and began to lower his pistols. The Doctor could feel a smile starting deep down in his hearts.

Raisin Jack's gaze shot back up to the Doctor, the burnt holes of his eyes narrowing. Bobby reached out for the Relic, but a shot rang out and his hand exploded in a blinding black light. He stumbled back. His head disappeared into blackness with another shot. Bobby's body fell to the ground and was quickly eaten by the swirling dark until there was nothing left.

Singing Crow Tullis pulled a knife from his belt and turned to face his attacker. Two more shots rang out and Tullis was engulfed in blackness. Soon he too was no more.

Jack slid the still-smoking pistols into their holsters. The hot metal caused the leather to creak. He walked slowly toward the Relic, half-buried and glowing on the dirt street. His spurs jingled lightly with each step. He stopped a few paces from the Relic and looked up at the Doctor. "No," he said.

The Doctor's smile died somewhere around his epiglottis.

The dust settled as the echoes of the gunfire and Beautiful Bobby's cries died away. Still, no one stirred. All eyes were on the street. Raisin Jack and the Doctor stood on either side of the glowing green Relic.

"What will I become if I take this?" Jack asked.

The Doctor frowned. "I don't know."

"I want to live," Jack said, and he lifted a pistol toward the Doctor. "And I won't let you stop me from doing that."

"Wait!" the Doctor yelled, but another shot rang out.

The Relic exploded in a cascade of green light. Tiny shards of jade landed around Jack's feet and then faded away to nothingness. Jack dropped the pistol and looked over to the side of the street, where Sheriff Gimble was lowering his rifle.

A pinpoint of black appeared in Jack's chest. He staggered backward and put a hand to the hole. It grew slowly and expanded outward. Jack stumbled along the road as he was engulfed by the blackness. He fell to his knees and then forward onto the street. The blackness vanished. The only thing left of Raisin Jack were his footprints in the soft dirt.

"Sheriff!" the Doctor shouted, turning his gaze to Gimble. "What did you do that for? You had no right." He looked at the ground where the Relic had lain. "Utterly destroyed," he sighed.

"He was going to kill you, Doctor!" Gimble said, meeting the Doctor at the side of the street.

The Doctor looked back at the empty street. "Oh," he sighed. "Yes, I suppose you're right."

Realizing the fun was over, the townsfolk began to filter out onto the street. They were used to outlaws and gunfights and crime. The wonders

of Raisin Jack would soon be forgotten in the coming gold rush.

The sheriff examined the street, but there was no trace of the Dead Gang or the mysterious Relic. Gimble turned to the Doctor, but he was gone. He spotted the odd man a ways down the road. He watched as the Doctor picked up his hat and walked toward Bodie's limits, an indistinct shape against the setting sun.

THE UNPUBLISHED DIARIES OF IAN CHESTERTON

BY PATRICK NEIGHLY

23 November 1963

Henry,

I have decided to make a record of the unbelievable events surrounding my ... abduction. That's what it is, of course. I have been kidnapped, along with Barbara Wright, a fellow teacher at Coal Hill, whom I believe you met when you stopped by last Tuesday to give me a lift home.

I don't know why I should address this to you, except that as an ... aficionado ... of Crowley you might be the most prepared of all my acquaintances to accept the terrifying details of my experience. I don't know if these diaries will ever reach you, or indeed if I will ever be allowed to send them. But for my sanity at least, some outlet must be found.

Yesterday, Miss Wright came to me with a plea to learn more about an odd student of ours. Holmes himself never undertook an investigation with such a nightmarish outcome.

We appear to be prisoners in a madhouse cell, under the wardership of our itinerant student and her sinister grandfather. I am still too distressed to make any sense of it, and will try to better communicate my situation at a later point.

25 November 1963

I scarcely comprehend it myself, but somehow our prison is a Ship, capable of traveling across not only geographic space, but time as well. The physics defy me, but either our mistrustful quartet has really engaged with Neanderthal man and provided them with fire, or I am already mad.

26 November 1963

The Doctor has deliberately sabotaged the TARDIS, as our captors call this vessel, so that we might explore some distant alien city in hopes of finding a replacement part. This event occurs only after the rest of us insisted upon leaving the dead planet on which we found ourselves. We are trapped, victims of the old man's curiosity, slaves to his cold intellect. I fear that free will shall be a foreign concept for the duration of our abduction.

29 November 1963

I have borne witness to horrors unknown on Earth. The uncanny survivors of nuclear fire — strange, multi-limbed abortions like metallic shoggoths. These Daleks, as they call themselves, know no fear, no emotion, no kindness. Worst of all are their inhuman voices, shrieking from transistorized speakers. The abominations are unable to withstand

the bright light of day for long, nesting instead in mobile armor that glides across the ground like an oncoming Panzer.

Headlines in the *Standard* over the past few years make me wonder whether humanity isn't in for the same fate.

30 November 1963

Nothing about this Doctor or our mobile prison is what it seems. The other day Barbara was browsing the Ship's library. (A library — as though our malevolent host was none other than some fantastic Nemo, piloting this strange *Nautilus* through the uncharted leagues of time.) It seems he keeps all the books under lock and key, allowing Miss Wright access only to those published on or before November 1963. And while she makes a selection, he himself remains no more than an aisle or two away, buried on pretext in a volume of Antoine de Saint-Exupéry.

1 December 1963

The madness on this Ship is threatening to tear its tiny crew apart. Susan, the mysterious pupil from my afternoon chemistry closes at Coal Hill, threatened us with scissors during a psychotic episode. Clocks have been melting, Dali-like, and the Ship's temperature has been fluctuating dramatically. I even suspect that the halls have been reconfiguring themselves slightly behind our backs, as though the very TARDIS was alive.

I am reminded of a BBC telecine your friend showed us after hours, depicting hallucinogen experiments some ten years back. If you recall, a dark-haired beatnik had been strapped to a chair and injected with

innumerable doses of LSD while the cameras rolled and government doctors observed the unfortunate chap. I imagine that what he saw can't compare with what Miss Wright and myself have endured. Each time I enter this strange machine I feel slightly ill — the control room itself has a clammy atmosphere, and although the Doctor and Susan insist that a thermostat problem is to blame, I can't help but feeling that a more Lovecraftian answer will reveal itself. It certainly hasn't escaped my attention that our journeys are initiated by a metallic mushroom.

3 December 1963

I fear the dates on these missives may be off by three days or more. My watch has stopped working, and the clocks inside the TARDIS are set for all manner of timekeeping, none of which I comprehend. I've resorted to keeping a tally on the wall of my room. Each morning I draw another mark, but it's difficult to separate nap from slumber as the interior lights never alter in intensity, and Susan and her grandfather never seem to sleep.

The most extraordinary thing happened today. The tense atmosphere of the past few days came to a head, with the Doctor realizing that a portion of his Ship had malfunctioned, apparently slinging us ever farther into prehistory. The Ship itself appears to have some sort of presence or intellect and seems to have been attempting to warn us of the impending catastrophe (what happens when a time machine travels before the Big Bang?) through psychic means, manifesting not unlike a poltergeist.

Surprisingly, it was Barbara who intuited the cause of our surreal experiences. (Suspicions that the Doctor doesn't understand this Ship of his have only mounted after this fact — Miss Wright and I both have the feeling that the increasing 'accidents' and 'component failures' are the

result of the pilot's incompetence.) Even more surprisingly, the Doctor acknowledged that it was Barbara who correctly diagnosed our situation, for the first time displaying a side that might be called human.

4 December 1963

Another 'component failure' has forced us outside, this time an electricity blackout affecting heat, light and water. Every day I am forced to remember that my fate is in the hands of another. I am still a prisoner.

Barbara, meanwhile, has forged a close bond with our former pupil and has even developed a quite civil relationship with her grandfather. I fear she is experiencing the sympathy many hostages feel for their captors. Her judgement may be impaired.

Day 1 1289

I do not know the day, but I have met Marco Polo! Extraordinary! Barbara in particular was deeply impressed; as she teaches (or perhaps, by now, taught) history at Coal Hill, I can only imagine how it must be for her. Like you or I meeting Einstein or Galileo, I imagine.

The Ship's electrical failure has ejected us onto the roof of the world.

Day 4 1289

Polo has claimed the TARDIS — it seems as though we have exchanged one set of captors for another, although in this instance Susan and her

grandfather are in the same situation as Miss Wright and myself. Will this open the old man's mind to our plight? His kindnesses to this point have been few, and grudging. But hope, as ever, remains.

We journey across Cathay to the palace of Kublai Khan, where the Doctor hopes to regain his Ship.

Just when I think I might adapt to my circumstances, another event occurs to inflame my mistrust and hatred of the Doctor. I find it increasingly easy to forget that he is my willing abductor most days, as though the four of us are prisoners of the TARDIS rather than adversaries. But bandits have struck our caravan, reminding me that Miss Wright continues to be in mortal peril each time the Ship lands. (The Doctor, in his evilly amiable way, tells me that the Ship doesn't actually land as such. If we were outside observers, the TARDIS would appear to evaporate from sight and reappear elsewhere. It seems too sinister a thought to imagine what happens in the interim, as though some physics were best left alone.)

It's difficult to think kindly of a person who would subject us to such danger, let alone his own granddaughter. And yet, he seems to genuinely care for the girl. Maybe he is alien after all. I certainly can't understand him.

Day 8 1289

Our journey toward Khan is interminable. Each way station is slightly larger and more opulent than the one before, suggesting that we are getting closer, but the final palace always fails to materialize. Barbara and I have taken to singing Coleridge's lines to pass the time: *In Xanadu did Kublai Khan a stately pleasure dome decree.* We have taught the rest of the poem to Susan, and the Doctor himself even joined in, regaling us with a tale (surely apocryphal) of meeting Coleridge in the spring and

trading tobaccos.

I expect Coleridge would have been a better fit for the Doctor's travels, and one suspects that a glimpse inside a box that's larger on the inside than the outside could be more to blame for the man's blistering incoherence than any chemical influence.

Day 9 1289

A delightful Chinese lass named Ping-Cho has told us the story of Ala-Eddin and his hashashins, drug-trafficking warriors known better to us as assassins. The Doctor later told me that the story is poppycock. He has begun to confide in me, perhaps as the only other man in our small group. Of Ala-Eddin, the Doctor says that history is quite different; there are conspiracies around the hashashin that may remain silent forever.

Marco Polo tells us the Khan's summer palace at Shang-Tu is close. There, Ping-Cho is to marry a man nearly sixty years her elder! I am reminded that our planet has alien cultures of its own, and today the Doctor and Susan seem closer to us than ever before.

Date unknown

Polo has returned the TARDIS, the Doctor having lost it to the Khan in a game of backgammon! Again he has bargained with our freedoms, as though Barbara and I are nothing more than insects that he tolerates without encouragement. Just as I begin to think a bond is forming, reality indicates otherwise.

Back in the Ship, I have lost all track of time; perhaps I should abandon this diary. We have no idea where the machine may take us

next. God help me; today I relished the feeling for the first time.

Yesterday, after departing the Khan in 1289 (my memoir is sure to have an excellent index, if nothing else), the Doctor took me to the library. I hadn't been before, and that deep in the TARDIS, the lights dim and carved woodwork overtakes the metal walls which characterize so much of the front chambers of the Ship, where we live.

The library is vast, probably the size again of the parts of the TARDIS I've seen in sum. The shelves form a haphazard warren, three or more floors in all from the looks of the mezzanines snaking above our heads. Only the first few meters are accessible; after that point an iron gate fences off the remaining volumes. Forbidden knowledge, the Doctor told Barbara that first day in the library back in November.

But today the Doctor led me to the gate with key in hand. After wending through acres of books, we finally came to a stop in front of a tome covered by an eye in a pyramid.

"The Masons?" I asked, stunned. That a time machine might hold the hidden secrets of Masonry seemed paradoxically more absurd to me than Daleks or Mongol warriors.

"Don't be absurd, my boy," the Doctor snapped. Not for the first time I wondered if he had the ability to read my mind. Instead, he flipped through the volume until he found a particular page. "The secret of the Hashashins." He pointed at the passage and stood back, proudly.

It only occurs to me now, in retrospect, that the gesture was made with a gravitas I didn't reciprocate at the time. A peace offering. The Doctor, deciding I am ready, handing me the apple. And I bit.

Ping-Cho's arranged mate died in advance of the wedding, by the way, which Barbara tells me is proof that nothing is set in stone. She seems far more at ease than I am.

Date unknown

The Doctor and I have grown closer together since the incident in the library, although he is still a distant and inscrutable figure. Barbara and I, it seems, educate him as often as he educates us. He knows nothing of compassion or charity.

Date unknown

Today we celebrated Christmas, although we have no idea of the relative date; it may already be 1964!

Barbara engineered the festivities, and I was happy to leave her to it. There were no presents to exchange, but we shared some carols with the other two. Barbara told Susan the story behind the holiday to the accompaniment of derisive snorts from the Doctor.

Date unknown

After a rare game of chess, the Doctor has walked me to the library again. Barbara has pointed out to me that he has been spending more time with the pair of us. In our early days together, he had time only for Susan or whatever mundane tasks were required for maintaining the Ship.

We climbed a twisting iron staircase to a mezzanine on the third floor, where a giant oval window stares out into a murky green view. I can't fathom what lies beyond, and the Doctor manipulates my questions on the matter. Is it space? Are we beneath the sea? Tiny particles float past, and again I fancy that the Doctor is a mad Nemo, exiled from his own land and determined to gain mastery of all the others.

"That book, Chesterton. Did you like it?" The Doctor was rummaging through a sheaf of papers, a monocle affixed to one eye.

“The Hashashin? It’s an incredible story.”

“A story, hmmm? And when is it no longer a story? If I had told you, that foggy evening last year, the truth about Susan and I, would that have been a story? Or would it have been something more, even though your small mind hadn’t obtained the proof it required?”

It is a strange thing, a discussion with the Doctor. Every time you call him by his appellation you’re reminded that you don’t know his real name, who he is, where he comes from. From time to time, hints of his true nature reveal themselves; when he speaks of my ‘small mind’ it’s a statement of fact relative to his own developed brain. I sometimes think that the catalog of my knowledge would be equal to a catalog of things he doesn’t know. And then the Ship appears in a new location and, for the first brief moments as we walk through the doors, we’re equals, explorers in a strange land.

“There’s a difference between fact and fiction. Thousand-year-old conspiracies stretch even my credulity, I’m afraid.”

“Let me tell you of conspiracies, Chesterton.” He put his arm around my shoulder and led me to the strange window, where we returned the baleful gaze of our green reflections. “The Americans of your planet are in a cold war. Why?”

I considered this carefully, lest I talk our allies into a logical trap. “Communism is anathema to democracy,” I finally answered.

At this, the Doctor sighed theatrically. “Your friend Miss Wright would be the first to tell you that America is a republic, not a democracy.”

“Capitalism?” I wagered.

“Tax incentives, import tariffs, minimum wage and corporate welfare. The American economy is no more a free market than that of the Soviets. The truth of the matter is this, Chesterton. The Cold War is a charade. The Americans out-spend the Soviets in about twenty years from the time you blundered into my Ship and, further, both sides know it will happen. So, if the Cold War has nothing to do with democracy or

capitalism, and both sides know in advance who will win, why continue the war, hmm? For what purpose?"

I didn't know, and said as much.

"War changes a society. It provides a pretext for other agendas. Nobody wants war, and yet inevitably war occurs. Who is pulling the strings? Who benefits from war?" The Doctor moved closer to the giant lens, and I wondered if he was asking the questions of himself. Why had he left his people?

"The same day you came into my Ship, Chesterton, the American president was assassinated. Or hashashinated, I might say. His agenda, it seems, didn't match that of the hidden masters of his country. In a few years, his brother will also be killed. So too will the orator, King. After that, the masters of America will once more be in control. Finally, one of their own will betray them, building an unexpected bridge to an ostensible enemy. He will be brought down by other means, and for the next fifteen years or so the agenda of the hidden masters will remain uncontested." He sighed, and looked at me again with keen eyes.

"At that time, a populist president will rise, with a contrary agenda. But the world will have changed; its citizens become more savvy. The hidden cabal will be unable to use the method of the hashashin to enforce their will. They will try to bring down this president incessantly for two terms, failing on every score. When his comrade is voted president, they will engineer to have a puppet installed instead. Smaller cold wars will begin, illusory enemies created where none should exist. Molehills will be made into mountains. And once again, the shadow government of your world's America will find themselves benefiting from this turn of events."

I stared at the Doctor. Why was he telling me this? Was it even true?

"History," he said finally, "is comprised of stories. Science, too. Nothing is as it seems. There is a darker foundation to the universe than you or I can comprehend. Know the truth about your planet, Chesterton, as I know the truth about mine."

And with that, he strode down the twisting staircase, leaving me alone with the swirling greens and ambers outside the curving window. I heard the tapping of his cane fade as he left the library and realized that he had left me alone among the forbidden shelves.

After a moment I dimmed the lights and followed his path from the library. I locked the gate and brought the key to the console room at the head of the Ship. As he had placed trust in me, so would I place trust in him.

Date unknown

Barbara has met the Aztecs and become a god!

Date unknown

We have encountered telepathic aliens, whom the Doctor has saved from poisoning. Could our influence be having an effect?

1794

Having landed in France and been promptly separated, the Doctor undertook to locate the other three of us. Barbara in particular is convinced that we are now merely prisoners of circumstance (the erratic TARDIS), and even I have a difficult time convincing myself that the only welfare concerning the Doctor is his granddaughter's.

64

We've been a month relaxing in a Roman villa, the owners having disappeared for the summer. After a week or so boredom set in, sending me into the TARDIS to search for this half-remembered diary. Reading over the preceding pages makes me aware how drastically things have changed.

Susan, for one, is no longer with us. The Daleks, it seems, invade Earth in the future, and our small team — no, our small family — is key to ending their reign of terror, having missed the initial blitzkrieg and only stumbling across the situation some years after the fact. London is decimated, and seeing the city in such a state is difficult. The shock hit Barbara much worse, I'm afraid, although I'm astounded at her ability to think of others in such trying times instead of herself.

After ridding Earth of the metal troopers, the Doctor locked Susan out of the Ship. It seems she'd fallen in love with a lad named David Campbell, and the Doctor decided it was time for her to know stability. He abandoned her on my world — the irony has not escaped me.

The Daleks. The Doctor has made himself an enemy, and that act has defined him. The universe seems a bit smaller now, and the Doctor almost heroic, a character from Wells or Verne.

Subsequently, we met a young orphan named Vicki, to whom to the Doctor took almost instantly. Leaving Susan has really changed the fellow, and now my doubts about him are entirely absent. We are a family in this machine of ours, taking what comes together.

Yet I know that it can't last. I'm still resolved to leave as soon as the Ship stumbles across winter 1963, or close enough afterward to still be considered home. A strange part of me aches at the thought that Miss Wright might not choose the same option.

Date unknown

The four of us saw ourselves preserved as museum exhibits yesterday, one of our potential fates. Like Barbara, I remain convinced that the future is an open book, despite what the Doctor insists.

The exhibits made me realize that I am still a prisoner — but the nature of my prison has changed. Despite everything that has happened, the people I've met (Richard the Lion Heart!) and the places I've been (Rome as it burned!), my overwhelming drive is to return to the London of 1963. Of us all, only the Doctor is truly free, and even he seems haunted by his own demons. For myself, I desire a return to a more familiar cell. A modest school in Shoreditch. Teaching the sciences that others have discovered. Perhaps dinner with Barbara at her Islington flat. My experiences have taught me that the boundaries we encounter are our own. The locks we struggle with are of our own making, and that is the key to unlocking them. The trick isn't to escape our cells — it's to become our own warders.

ACTS OF KINDNESS

BY ALEX STEER

"Spirit worship appears in the cultural roots of hundreds of civilizations throughout the galaxy; from the Engatri to the Exxilons. Even the mechanized rationalism of Time Lord society is not untouched. There are certain traits common to these proto-religions — if we are looking for anything like a typical example, then the Dinka of Earth seem most appropriate. Though thrown headlong into the modem world by Christian missionaries and a civil war at the beginning of the Second Dark Age (which spanned the late twentieth century and almost all the twenty-first), these Southern Sudanese tribesmen worshiped a Supreme Being, Nialith, and the many spirits of the marshy grasslands they inhabited. Did they exist? Were they gods, aliens or fairy tales? If any Dinka knew the answer for sure, he never disclosed it..."

— Dr. Blue Nkukwe,

Spiritualist Religions in a Rational Universe, 3017

Omdurman, Sudan: August 2009

The spirits were angry. They held a council of war in Daniel's head and told him all the ways to kill a man.

Dawn had risen hot and dry and ivory white, so unlike the sticky green light of the plains and the marshes back home. Inside the old green cattle truck, Daniel had woken hours before the other children. His eyes had adjusted immediately to the glare. Out beyond the canvas canopy of

the truck, he had seen a busy, dusty road.

They were still moving.

Keep down, the spirits had told him, *do not let them hear you.* In the front of the truck he could still hear the men talking in their unknown language. They were both Arabs, men from the north of the country, the spirits had told him. They were not his people; they were not Dinka. They were foreigners to him.

The children were just stirring — some cried, some were still too shocked or terrified to speak as they felt the dry heat of the Sudanese desert crawl over them. Most were younger than Daniel. None of them understood what had happened. Not properly; not as Daniel did. The spirits had told him everything during the night, whispering to him as they always did in their strange, half-secret language. Always they were loudest at night, crawling into the cool, dark spaces of his thoughts when the sun set.

He knew these children — most were from his village, and all were Dinka. He had grown up with many of them, around the marshes of the southern countiy. Lying across from Daniel was Paul Ogonkwe. They had attended the local mission school together. They had been christened in the chapel and had received their new names — the names of ancient men from books the Christians read. But Daniel had another name, a name the Christians would not understand. The secret name the spirits had given him.

The foreign men were shouting. Daniel could feel the vibrations in the low sides of the vehicle change a few seconds before it drew to a halt. The men were getting out, banging the truck with the same sticks they had used to herd the children like cattle the previous night. Their language was unfamiliar, but the spirits whispered in Daniel's ear what they were saying. *Be quiet. No more noise. Get out.*

For a moment he closed his eyes, and his mind was filled with images. Last night, the attack on the village. A civil war, the spirits had explained. Daniel didn't know what one of those was. Only that the

cattle and most of the men had been slaughtered, and their bodies had been burned or thrown into the river. The old wise men of the village, those who interpreted the spirits, had been taken from their homes and beaten. Most had died. Daniel had no tears for the old men. They had beaten him once, as the foreigners had beaten him last night when he had told them how the spirits spoke to him. Now they lay dead. Perhaps it was a punishment — the spirits would not say.

At all of these things, the spirits of the Dinka homeland were angry. But the old men did not matter: The spirits spoke to Daniel. Even the cattle were not important.

Daniel's father was dead. Daniel had lain against his body for hours, never moving, waiting for the foreign soldiers to go. He had not seen his mother since she had been taken away. She had been screaming, like all the women. Whether she was alive or dead, the spirits would not say. Perhaps they did not know. Perhaps, as they said, Daniel's father did not matter, either.

After the soldiers, the men had come with their trucks and their clubs. They had found Daniel among the dead. This, too, was part of the ritual of civil war.

A man appeared at the back of the truck, barking orders. The eldest of the men who had taken the children the previous night, with a face the color of burnt grass, scored with lines like valleys, pitted with old scars and dark eyes, which gleamed like diamonds in coal. At once the spirits were whispering their instructions. He saw the man not as a single being, not even a foreign one, but as organs and nerve clusters, the machinery of pain. The spirits told him where to move, and how fast. They picked out the soft parts of skin and eye, the hair which could be pulled, the bones which would break. And in veins and arteries, words he did not understand, blood coursing, waiting to be spilled. *Here is your enemy*; they told Daniel. *Here is your target.*

He closed his eyes again. *No,* he thought. Into his mind — his own memories this time, not the spirits' impressions — flowed the memory of

his father — the sight and feel of the body as it cooled, and the sharp, familiar smell of blood. There would be no more killing.

The back of the truck had been pulled down, and the men were shepherding the children out onto the dusty ground. Most still looked dazed. They moved like cattle, prodded and pulled, driven by the flow of unthinking bodies. Daniel glanced around, eyes flickering left and right, looking for danger. All the time, the spirits whispered their dark commands. They saw men and children as targets, organs, pain receptors, and every brick and shoe and branch as a weapon waiting to be taken in hand. Daniel ignored their instructions.

Outside the vehicle, a dull hammering sound, and an acrid smell — the smell of his village as it had burned. The other Arab, a stocky, sweaty man who glanced about like a nervous animal, was holding a gun and shouting, shepherding the children into a group. There, at the front, Paul Ogonkwe stared at the man. There was something animal in Paul's eyes, a fear Daniel had not seen before. Paul was scared, like all the others. The looks on the foreign men's faces needed no translation.

Daniel emerged from the shade of the truck, and the light hit him like a million shards of glass. His eyes took in everything, guided by the spirits, focusing more intensely as his brain fully analyzed his new environment.

They were about fifty paces from the dusty road, and ahead of them stretched a city. There were signs that Daniel could not read, but the spirits spoke again. This was Omdurman, the capital city, the city of the enemies from the north. They were in Arab country, far from home. It was a dead place — there were no spirits here. A short distance away, a few cars sped, and cattle trucks shuddered unsteadily. Here, set back from the road, were other men, with groups of women or children who huddled together as if for warmth in this baked-dry place. Some were Dinka; some seemed to be other Arabs. Maybe, Daniel thought, the rituals of war affect everyone here.

Where are we? he asked the spirits.

At the market.

What is being sold? These people?

We are all being sold, Daniel Even you.

The men were looking around nervously. Were even they afraid of being caught here? The more nervous they got, the more they pushed and hit their captives, the more Daniel felt his anger rise — the righteous anger of the Dinka spirits, harder to control with each minute in the assaulting sunlight.

You can free them all, Daniel. We have taught you how. We have taught you to ki—

No.

We have to be free.

Daniel looked up at the men who had taken him from his village. They were talking to a tall man with dark skin and an unfamiliar accent. Despite the dry heat, he wore a linen suit and carried a briefcase. Daniel's eyes and ears locked onto the conversation. The older of the men who had brought him here was speaking, while the younger, sweaty one watched the road. At last the foreign stranger said something to the older Arab. A nod and a glance passed between as he handed over the briefcase. It was a look Daniel had seen many times before — whenever his father had bought cattle.

They are trading in human life, Daniel.

"Be quiet," Daniel said aloud. The greasy man, the lookout, shouted something at him, and the spirits did not translate. Then the man turned back to the road, where an old car was turning off, heading toward the small crowds of people.

The spirits were talking again. *Cities are dangerous places,* they said. *In the country we are safe. No one can find us. In the city you cannot hide the knowledge we have given you. Even the spirits have enemies, Daniel. If they find us, they will kill us — and they will kill you.*

The lookout coughed, loudly and deliberately. *Danger*, the spirits hissed.

The older man had taken the stranger's briefcase. Now he walked over to the crowd and picked out three of the children. The black man in the linen suit nodded, and the old car approached. The doors opened as both the Arab men motioned the three chosen boys into the back of the vehicle. The black man got into the passenger seat, the doors were locked, and the car moved away, its engine roaring like a dying animal.

Images of death, of motion and violence, flashed across Daniel's eyes and into his imagination. He blinked them back, shaking his head.

You have displeased us, Daniel, the spirits said. *We have taught you to kill; it is your function and ours.*

Stop talking.

You must be free. The spirits will not communicate with slaves.

Be quiet, be quiet...

Death is your birthright. Blood is your being.

I will kill no one. Go away. Enough...

For a moment, he looked up. Another man was turning from the road, walking toward them. His eyes locked immediately, unbidden.

Is death not a part of life? In becoming death, do you not also become life?

"No more!" Daniel screamed. "Shut up shut up shut up..."

He could see the man clearly now. His skin was pale, almost ivory, and his hair was the yellow color of dry grass. Daniel had seen Europeans before — most of the Christians had been Europeans — but never like this. Everything about the man was bright, everything held his attention, from his long cream coat to his bright blue eyes. Eyes Daniel could see, even at this distance.

Daniel was shaking. Around him, the other children moved away as the spirits reacted to the approaching stranger. *We are in danger. You must escape...*

His hands moved to his head, pulling at the skin, nails clawing at the surface, trying to push down into the bone. For the first time, Daniel's body was not under his control. He wanted to see the stranger...

"...shut up shut up shut up..."

...but the spirits did not.

Fingers slipped over his eyes and pushed in. The pain was incredible. His nerves would not stop buzzing with the spirits' angry voices.

"...shut up shut up..."

Daniel screamed. Blood was running down his cheeks from the scratches in his face. And in his head, trapped beneath the soft bones of his skull, a light was pounding. The anger of the spirits, growing faster, brighter, louder. They were... ...scared.

Something was coming — something worse than the spirits. The thing the spirits feared. Daniel sank to his knees as the screams inside his mind pressed against his thoughts, dragging him down into madness. He had become an animal, he realized. He could not control the pain, the anger.

His eyes forced themselves open again. They were stinging with tears, and maybe blood. But everything looked different as he looked up. The desert was shining with a million lights. The sky was a thousand times more blue, and beyond it he could feel the stars, tiny points of fire, familiar to him yet strange. His swept his eyes around the crowd, across the widening ring of children spreading away from him, and he saw them all, and saw the foreigners, as the spirits had always told him they were: Organs, nerve connections, the solid and the liquid, blood and water and electricity. Every one a potential target. Daniel's senses were changing — the spirits were changing them, turning the things he saw and heard and felt into something strange, terrible and beautiful.

Then he looked up and saw the pale stranger. And inside his head, for the first time in ten years, the spirits fell utterly silent.

The man was talking to Daniel's captors. Like all the others he had seen that morning, the man had a briefcase. *But that*, Daniel *realized*, was where the similarity ended.

His clothes and hair shone like ivory and gold in the magnesium sunlight. He wasn't tall, and his clothes were strange and old-fashioned, a cream coat and striped trousers. But the spirits were watching him, looking

through all of Daniel's heightened senses, focusing absolutely. And Daniel saw the man as he really was — the infinitely more complex nerve connections, the strong lungs and twin hearts. And, deep within him, the power in the blood, the codes and programs and inhuman patterns which the spirits recognized, mingling with the same, human patterns Daniel saw in everyone else. The spirits were confused and afraid. They had found something, Daniel realized, they did not understand, and their fear was reflected in everything the boy saw and heard and felt, in the paranoid sunshine and the grating, frenzied roar of passing cars.

Flee, the spirits were saying, but there was no power in their voices now.

The man handed the briefcase over to Daniel's captors.

He shook their hands, but there was no joy in his expression, no human contact.

This man must/must not be obeyed.

His cool blue gaze swept over the crowd, and then stopped. He was looking at Daniel. He was walking toward him. The spirits grew louder in their insane chorus, their words unfamiliar to Daniel now.

Do not trust him. He is an enemy.

He is a superior.

Request bio-ident.

The spirits had never been discordant before. They guided the Dinka, and they spoke to Daniel with one voice. Now they were fractured, squabbling like children.

He is/is not a threat. He must/must not be eliminated...

The man reached out his hand. In his mind, Daniel felt the spirits scream — a thousand, agonized screams. Daniel looked into the man's eyes, and beyond them, and he saw what had terrified the spirits.

The Dinka had only one word for a man like this.

* * *

Nialith. The boy had called him Nialith. The supreme god of the Dinka — the one all the spirits feared.

The Doctor stood at the end of the bed and watched the boy sleep. Over and around him tiny metallic creatures scuttled, taking biodata samples and brain scans, analyzing the extent of the damage. The TARDIS took good care of its guests.

The 'spirits' were gone. The boy was recovering with the speed which only children possessed.

"I want those filed away safely," the Doctor told his ship. "They're a very important resource. And not one I want to leave lying about for anyone to find." He paused. "Well, not again, anyway."

"Well?"

The Doctor turned round. "Very well, thank you, Turlough." Turlough pulled a face. "He's recovering."

Turlough walked into the room. "So, you managed to track down this — What was it?"

"Inventory." The Doctor sat on the edge of the bed, staring at Daniel, watching him breathe. "Daniel's spirits were hereditary. A genetic information storage system. A catalog of Time Lord military operations, tactics and weaponry stretching back ten thousand years. Quite an impressive collection. And a barbaric one."

'Time Lord? So what was it doing in the Sudan?" Turlough leaned against one of the pillars at the edge of the room.

"Gallifrey, with its usual tact and concern for lower life forms, has been hiding its dirty laundry on Earth, wiring the Inventory into a few select Dinka families as junk DNA in the expectation that it would never be found by anyone."

"And it didn't work?"

"Oh, it worked all right," the Doctor said. "But over centuries, the original information became corrupted, mingled with the bloodline of a few Dinka families. The Inventory turned from a passive datastore into a very active set of battle commands. The result, after quite some time, was

Daniel. A child born hardwired with all the killer knowledge of the Time Lords, believing that he was filled with the spirit of his ancestors." He paused. Turlough raised a lazy eyebrow. "Religion, politics and war. A dangerous combination."

Turlough walked away, leaving the Time Lord alone with the child.

He had traced the DNA sequence to here — to Omdurman, to that hot August day. He had bargained on the data being accessible only to high-ranking Time Lords, never to humans.

"And you suffered from a very bad case of crossed wires when you met me, didn't you?" he added aloud. It had shut itself down. But for that, Daniel would probably have killed him.

At least he could wake up an ordinary child, with some chance of an ordinary life. If it could be called ordinary to return to a decimated village. The place from which he had been taken, put up for sale and bought.

Bought. That was it — that was the truth. No heroic rescues this time, no showdowns or confrontations. A simple transaction, a lucky guess that the Inventory would disagree with the Doctor's curious biology. He hadn't been saving Daniel's life; he had been safeguarding his people's interests.

Protecting the universe, not the individual.

The spirits, the Inventory, had been right, the Doctor realized. They had recognized him for what he was. Not human, not even close. He could never understand what Daniel felt. He could save whole worlds, but he couldn't rescue another child from Sudan, from the civil war. From slavery and the life time had planned for them.

He looked down at his clothes, the Edwardian finery he always wore. *You always try*, he thought, a*nd you like to think you're human. But you don't understand them. You arrive and you leave. Daniel will return to a war-tom country, to a family most likely all dead. You haven't made anything better, Doctor.*

You've just preserved continuity.

After a while, the Doctor realized he didn't know whether the thoughts in his head were his own. So he kept listening.

You're not like them. You're unlike, you're unkind. For all these acts of kindness, you're still an alien. You play the hero, but you cannot rescue those children. You can save civilizations, but not lives; galaxies, but not communities; countless worlds, but not the one you love.

He stood up and walked to the door. Behind him, Daniel kept sleeping. The Doctor rested a hand on one of the columns of his ancient ship.

"I suppose you always hurt the ones you love. Isn't that right, old girl?"

He stood up and walked away, as the TARDIS drifted through the infinite vortex.

INTERLUDE

BY PETER ANGHELIDES AND STEPHEN COLE

The following scene was the original opening to Chapter 10 of the BBC novel The Ancestor Cell. *It is presented here uncut for the first time.*

The séance had begun mid-afternoon, but little natural light penetrated the attic. The hatch was closed so that no one would know they were up there, hiding in the gloom. The flickering candles guttered as the wind blew under the eaves.

Fitz had pulled a glass-topped table from one of the dank comers and propped it so that it sat securely on two firm crossbeams. Eleanor, the girl from the coffee shop with the poky flat in Archway and the wry smile and the tight sweater, sat opposite him. Her spooky flatmate Bob squatted beside her on a rolled-up offcut of alarmingly pattered nylon carpet. Fitz hoped that Bob would get a nasty shock of static electricity before they'd finished. Bob was sitting too close to Eleanor, which was supposed to be what Fitz was doing this afternoon. Perhaps he could arrange for Bob to get a different kind of shock.

Eleanor scattered the Scrabble tiles over the glass sheet while Fitz lit the fat wax candles at either end of the table. Bob toyed with the drinking glass, finally upending it and placing it in the middle of the circle of letters.

Once they started, Fitz discovered it was too easy to steer the glass.

He'd decided to be Indian Joe, a spirit from the other side, and was able to push the glass to each letter in turn to spell out a message from the Beyond. The edge of the glass drinking cup scraped on the surface of the table, making Fitz grit his teeth.

But Eleanor lapped it all up, as he'd known she would. One quick glance at her hippy shirt and the aspirational posters in her bedroom had been enough to tell him that.

Bob was less easily convinced. "How come he can spell in English if he's an Indian?"

"I suppose the spirits are translating," Fitz suggested in a soft voice, keeping his eyes on Eleanor's pretty eyes.

"He sounds like Tonto," observed Bob, his voice a squeak as he took a drag on his spliff. He offered it to Eleanor, who accepted it wordlessly.

After eight more letters, Eleanor said: "Oh my God."

Fitz had made the glass spell 'Kemo Sabe.'

"Knock it off, Kreiner," said Bob. "You're pushing it. In fact, you're pushing your luck."

Eleanor stared at Fitz. "You wouldn't?" She stood up, grasping the drinking cup tightly in her right hand. "Oh Fitz, how could you? Do you get a buzz out of playing the fool?" *Fitz wasn't fast enough with his denial.*

"It'll give you a buzz, love." She flung the glass down. The glass table top crazed right across, and Scrabble tiles bounced off in all directions. Eleanor scrabbled across to the loft hatch, Bob trailing behind her awkwardly.

Fitz was about to protest, to calm her down, but the glass table surface suddenly dropped into pieces between the table frame. At once, there was a fierce, rising hum. And then the wasps started to pour from the ragged glass gap.

The humming, buzzing cloud surged over him. Fitz flung himself aside as the wasps enveloped him.

They batted against him like a handful of thrown sand, bouncing off the skin of his forehead, his cheeks, the backs of his hands where he

threw them up to protect his face. He gasped involuntarily as he waited for the feel of the first sting, and one of the wasps fell into his mouth. He scrabbled with two fingers, scraping the tiny, fizzing creature from his tongue, spitting repeatedly and praying that no more got between his lips.

They were crawling in his hair, over his ear lobes, into his ears. He wanted to scream out for help, but all he could do was howl with his mouth clamped shut, snorting air in short, desperate bursts down his nose to stop them crawling up his nostrils.

Now they were under his collar, crawling into his shirt. He flung himself across the attic, knowing he could never reach the loft hatch in time. He buried himself between the tom boxes of mouldering paperbacks, buried his face in the rolled-up carpet offcut, and screamed and screamed. As he breathed in, the dust from the carpet filled his lungs. He could feel the wasps tickling his neck, ruffling his long hair where it curled over his collar.

"Hey, hey, what is it?"

He stared about himself wildly. The bright, new light scalded his eyeballs, frightening him almost as much as the nightmare.

Tarra was clutching him firmly in her arms now, stroking the back of neck again and talking in the same soothing tone. "Hey, come on, it's just a dream, Fitz."

He gave himself to the hug, slumping against her in relief rather than any other motive. Besides which, he felt limp all over. His breathing slowly returned to a ragged kind of normal, though his heart continued to wallop his ribcage.

"What was all that about?" Taira asked him.

Fitz reluctantly allowed her to stop hugging him. He kept hold of her hand. "Just a weird nightmare. I dunno." He stared about them.

Of course. The musty smell came from the undusted upholstery on the seat, the buzzing sound was the noise of the underground carriage — no, what had Tarra called it? Oh yeah, the Transtube. The travel system

that would take them to the center of the capital, or was it the Capitol, wherever that was. Their section of the Transtube was empty, unless his screams had scared the other passengers away. Just like the Northern Line late on Friday night, he thought.

No matter how closely he looked, though, he couldn't see any adverts for Beecham's Powders.

WHO TORTURES THE TORTURERS?

BY JAMAS ENRIGHT

The blue box stood out incongruously on the tarmac amidst scorch marks on the ground, but there was no fuss made. The air remained undisturbed by any noise, despite the raucous sound that ended only moments before. No one came running from the dilapidated two-story sprawling building beside the runway, which otherwise might well house a teeming multitude.

The door of the blue box swung backwards, opening, and a scruffy figure popped out, rubbing his hands gleefully, black coat swirling about his body. The almost ragged shirt, checked pants and scuffed shoes only added to the impression of disarray. Eyes peered out from under an untidy mop of hair, above a face both cheeky and welcoming. "Yes, yes. Very peaceful. A thought stuck, and the face because more serious. "Perhaps a bit too peaceful."

As he scanned the surroundings, he received an abrupt push from behind. "Oh, come on, Doctor. Stop hogging all the room."

"All right, Jamie, all right," the Doctor muttered, hopping out of the way. "It looks safe enough. Come on out."

"Aye, that's what you said last time," Jamie replied before exiting the TARDIS. "But those beasties were no' safe at all." He waggled a finger at the Doctor disapprovingly, placing his other hand on his hips, between shirt and kilt. Although the kilt only came down to his knees, the rest of Jamie's legs were hidden by the stout shoes and long stockings he wore.

"A small amount of forgiveness goes a long way, Jamie. You'd do well—"

Before he could finish another two people came out. "Here, what's all this? You two fighting again?" a man in a sailor suit asked out in a mocking tone.

"Where are we?" the other person, a blonde-haired woman, asked. She was sporting a red-and-white-striped top, and a bright-red mini-skirt. "It looks rather like an airport."

"A space port, Polly," the Doctor said. "But I don't think it's been used for some time." He indicated the ground where the scorch marks, though violently burnt into the ground, had faded over time as nature had its way, covering the strip with dirt and fallen leaves.

"Well, if there's no one here, perhaps we could just go back into the TARDIS before ye get us intae any trouble," Jamie said.

"I never get us into trouble. It's not my fault—"

"All right, all right," the man interrupted. "But Jamie has a point. Is there anyone here?"

Oh, Ben, perhaps they all left because of some disaster," Polly suggested.

"Some disaster! Are we all right. Doc?"

"Oh, I wouldn't worry too much, Ben. There's no sign of anything happening right now. Perhaps we should just take a look around. Let's try the main terminal over there."

* * *

"It ain't half dusty, Doctor," Ben coughed, as they moved through the semi-darkness inside. "How do you expect to find anything in here?" He peered through the dim light, able to make out some large alcoves and the row of terminal desks, but details eluded him.

"Doctor," Polly called out, from some distance away. "Over here. It seems to be some kind of tourist bureau."

The Doctor fished a torch out of his pocket, and played the light over the pamphlets that Polly had found. They were garish in colour, and contained writing that the others couldn t read, although the Doctor didn't have the same problem. "'The sights of Trist,'" he read. "Hmm... 'City of life, The heart of the empire...' Ah, here we go. 'The planet Vandiel.' Vandiel, Vandiel, why do I know that name?" the Doctor muttered to himself.

Giving the torch to Ben and the pamphlet to Polly, the Doctor started to pull items from his pocket, piling them in Jamie's arms. "Let's see... Where is it? Here we go," he said cheerfully, extracting his 500 Year Diary. He starting flicking through the pages, scrabbling to catch a few as they fell out from overuse. "I remember reading something about it while on the Sense Sphere... Yes, there was an empire, just a small one really, but..." The Doctor trailed *off.* "Of course. How stupid of me. Come on everyone, we've got to get back!"

Grabbing items back from Jamie, dropping some, the Doctor led the way at a fast pace back to the side door they broke in through. "Back to the TARDIS!" he insisted. The others followed with some consternation.

Outside a roaring noise made the Doctor look up, his face pale. "A ship's coming! Quickly, quickly!" He pushed the others on before following himself, but realized that they wouldn't make the TARDIS in time. "Wait!" he called out. "Come back!" Unfortunately, Ben and Jamie were too far, but the Doctor was able to grab Polly and pull her back.

A long black ship came in for a landing, the kind of ship that could only be used by the harsher side of military forces, complete with spiky antennas and deadly weaponry. The ship roared down, making the Doctor and Polly throw up their hands to protect their heads from the noise and the blast of retrorockets, shooting the debris that had accumulated on the tarmac over the years into an obscuring cloud. The ship touched down amidst this confusion. The Doctor tried to peer through his fingers, but the craft blocked his sight of Ben and Jamie. Fortunately, a few moments later, the rockets fired to life again, lifting

the spaceship up on a bed of superheated particles.

But when the ship cleared the landing strip, and the leaves and grit had settled again, there was no sign of Ben and Jamie.

* * *

"Let go of me," Ben cried out, as he and Jamie were dragged along the dingy corridors of the ship by the same men that grabbed them outside. They wore some kind of uniform, brown with black piping, but neither Jamie nor Ben had a chance to recognize the fleet uniform of Earth's space armada.

"You'll have to see the General," one of the men holding Jamie said. "He doesn't approve of blockade violations."

"What blockade? Ben, what's he talking about?"

"I don't know, do I? Doesn't look like we got much choice, though."

After being hauled through a hatchway, they were standing on the bridge of the ship. There was a pilot's station near the front of the room, which was dominated by a large viewscreen that took up almost the entire wall. There were other consoles near the back, but in the middle of the room was the centerpiece, a large chair. It was currently unoccupied, but the person who would sit there was obviously the large man who stood behind the pilot, watching on the viewscreen their trip over the planet.

"We picked up two men, sir," one of the soldiers holding Ben reported.

The man, the General, turned around, making Ben and Jamie try to take a step back from his air of authority, though they were held too tightly. Tall, dark hair rigidly cut, well muscled, a fierce expression on his face, the General exuded an undeniable presence.

"I don't know how you got past us," the General growled in a low but penetrating voice, "but we picked up the energy of your ship. I do not allow civilians on the planet and have a good mind to throw you two

in the brig. If we hadn't been nearby, the Vandals might have got you first."

"Vandals? What are ye talking about?"

At that, the General's expression became even worse. "Are you from one of those sympathizer groups that insist on calling them 'Vandielians?' I won't have any of that here. We all know they attacked first, and what they did demands total retribution. They are nothing but vandals." He stood over them, as if daring them to contradict them before his face.

"Er, no. Sir," Ben added hurriedly. "What Jamie meant is that we landed here without knowing any of this. We've been a long time out of it, and haven't heard about any Vandals."

Jamie nodded quickly.

The General remained silent, contemplating them. "Sergeant Rothwell, get them out of my sight."

"Can ye nae take us back to our ship?" Jamie asked hopefully.

As he turned away, the General said "No one lands until this planet is cleansed."

Ben and Jamie were unable to say anything more as the sergeant ushered them out.

* * *

"Doctor, what is it? Who were they?" Polly asked as the Doctor wrung his hands in anxiety.

"I hope they weren't the Vandielians, but I can't remember what their ships looked like. Oh, Polly, I'm afraid Ben and Jamie are in the most grave danger. The Vandielian empire was small, but it was incredibly vicious. They swept through planets, butchering and pillaging wherever they went. They committed the most horrendous atrocities, the things they did to people..." The Doctor shuddered.

"What happened to them?" Polly asked, fear starting to creep into her

voice, alarmed by what the Doctor was saying.

The Doctor hopped from foot to foot, looking as if he was trying to achieve takeoff to go after Ben and Jamie himself. "They met the human race in one of their expansionist phases. At that point, the human space fleet was more powerful, but the Vandielians fought incredibly hard. Eventually, the Vandielian empire just collapsed, almost overnight. Most social historians claim internal factors brought about their downfall. But... Oh, I shouldn't go on." The Doctor put a hand to his face, biting into a knuckle, trying to contain himself.

"Oh, do, Doctor. It sounds horrible, but you can't stop now."

The Doctor took Polly's hand, as much reassurance for himself as for Polly. "Well, the truth is, when the humans came to Vandiel, they found the planet almost defenseless, and attacked them. In their way, they were just as vicious as the Vandielians were, visiting upon them the same tortures that the Vandielians had meted out. Including the deaths." The Doctor was squeezing Polly's hand so tight it was white, but Polly didn't notice. "What the Vandielians did to others, was done to them."

* * *

"We'll have to put you in one of our cargo holds until we reach the main fleet. They'll take care of you then," Sergeant Rothwell said as he led them along.

Jamie was looking around as they walked the distance, the doors in the corridor sides having small windows. Something caught his eye, and he paused for a moment to look inside, then gasped with shock. Inside was a soldier and something that looked humanoid, but definitely wasn't human. Its face resembled a fish more, gills at the neck and a large rounded forehead. Large eyes stared ahead, glazed over, as best Jamie could tell. But what really caught Jamie's attention was what the soldier was doing to the alien.

"Get away from there," the sergeant growled. Ben was closer, and

joined Jamie to see what was inside. The alien's arms and legs were pinned to a table, with large bolts through the limbs themselves. On the head was a helmet, large probes descending through pipes directly into the skull. The alien must have been in pain, being conscious while this was going on, yet its head was fixed in place and its mouth gagged to stop any response.

A hand on each shoulder turned Ben and Jamie around to face Sergeant Rothwell.

"You're killing it!" Ben yelled.

"That is far kinder than what they did," the sergeant spat. "Imagine pins through shoulders and hip, hands and feet bound together. They say you can go if you can remove the pins, and they just laugh when you struggle feebly. And that was what they did," a tilt of his head indicated the alien, "for fun."

Ben and Jamie looked down, still wanting to protest but unable to answer the haunted look they saw.

"That's just a little bit of what they deserve. And we're giving them everything. Deaths too."

At this Ben couldn't stand still. "So, what, you're torturing them all? Killing them all? What gives you that right? Are you at war? But even that couldn't justify what we just saw. That's inhuman!"

"So are they," the soldier replied with a dark expression.

* * *

"It sounds so inhuman," Polly said slowly, coming to the full realization of what exactly the Doctor was meaning. "If they're with the Vandielians, they're in trouble. But if they were picked up by humans, they're in just as much trouble."

" I think the humans might be better," the Doctor said, trying to find some bright side. "They at least might not do anything too nasty to fellow humans." He patted Polly's hand, but neither of them felt much

better.

"So, how do we find out where they are?"

"We'll just have to go to the nearby city," replied the Doctor, pointing to a large city that sat a few miles away toward the horizon, "and see what we can find out. With luck, we might be able to acquire a ship without anyone knowing."

" Can't we use the TARDIS?"

The Doctor harrumphed. "Ah, a short trip in the TARDIS... Well..." he muttered sheepishly.

"I understand," said Polly consolingly. "Come on. Walking it is."

* * *

The city could have been any modern metropolis. Tall buildings surrounded Polly, but she shivered at the lack of sound and the sight of decay that had blighted this place. Most of the windows were smashed. That was, presuming the building was still standing, as many weren't. In fact, one was in mid-topple, pressed up against the structure beside it. Only because half of it had been destroyed by some bomb it hadn't completely fallen over, taking the other building with it. Vegetation was starting to reclaim the city already, green and red vines crawling over the concrete facades, like veins carrying a sick disease.

"If this is a Vandielian city, it looks like it was ransacked long ago," she said in a hush.

"Yes. By the humans most likely," the Doctor agreed. "But even in the most derelict cities, there are usually some poor souls trying to survive. Hello!" he called out, causing faint echoes.

Polly grabbed his arm. "Are you sure that's wise. Doctor? If they were as awful as you say—"

"I think their time has gone now."

"If that's true, then why did that ship appear?"

"Yes, good point. Perhaps their time is almost over then. It certainly

looks over here."

There was a sound of falling rubble that drew their attention. "Not completely over," Polly said.

"Let's take a look, shall we? They might know of a ship around here we can use."

The Doctor led the way into a nearby building, and Polly followed to find most of the back missing. A motion caught her eye and she turned to see something duck out of the way.

The Doctor scrambled over the piles of debris, Polly close on his heels, as they chased the figure. It was only after it ran down a dead-end alley, blocked at the other end by a fallen wall, that they managed to comer it.

It cowered before them, a fish-like being clothed in a simple brown robe. It reminded Polly a bit of the Atlantean fish people they had met. "No, it's not my time! Not yet, not yet!" it cried out, hands raised before it in a pleading gesture.

The Doctor held his own hands up placatingly. "We're not here to harm you," he said gently. "We're just looking for a ship we can use."

Slowly the alien raised its head. "A ship?"

"Yes," said Polly. "Just a ship."

The alien shook its head. "There is no ship here. There is nothing here but me. I am the last, and will be one of the last." Polly took the Doctor aside for a moment. "That's a Vandielian? It doesn't look very threatening?"

"No," the Doctor whispered, "it doesn't, does it? But why? There's something more going on here..." The Doctor approached the alien again, and asked, "Last? Last what?"

" The last. So that we know that everything is over."

" Everything? What everything? I think you have some explaining to do."

* * *

Ben paced the cargo hold, while Jamie watched him. “Och, sit down, Ben. We can’t get out of here.”

“We have to; we have to get back to the TARDIS. What if these Vandals get ahold of the Doctor and the Duchess? Not that the humans here seem much better,” Ben added darkly.

“But we’re stuck in here.” Jamie waved his hand around them, proving his point. The hold was not much bigger than the single room cottage he had grown up in back in Scotland.

There were containers here, mostly metal, some made of substances he had never seen. Some containers were like barrels, some like boxes. Indeed, he was sitting on one of the larger boxes. But of doors, there was only one he could see, the one they had been unceremoniously pushed through, which had shut quickly behind them, and stayed closed, no matter how they had tried to open it.

“And there has to be some way out. The sick prisoner routine? No, I don’t think they’ll fall for that...” Ben gazed about. “But there is something they have to respond to, especially on a ship. A fire alarm!”

Jamie looked at Ben eagerly. “Here, how do we set the fire alarm off?”

“There must be something in here. Help me open these boxes.”

Quick investigation turned up a squat, bulky object that the printing on the side identified it as a portal energy generator, in a box marked: Emergency Supplies. Jamie watched, munching on some rations that had also been in there, while Ben wrestled with the covering on the generator. “Oh, if only I had something I could pry this off with,” Ben groaned.

Jamie retrieved his dirk from the sheath in his stocking. “Will this help?”

“Why didn’t you say you had that before?”

“I didnae know you needed it, did I?”

With the aid of the knife, Ben pried the cover off, exposing the wiring. With more luck that skill, Ben crossed wires, and managed to fuse the device. Smoke rose from the generator.

The result was immediate. A red light pulsed urgently, and a siren rent the air. Ben and Jamie crossed to the cargo hold door, but it was still closed.

"It's sealed us off!" Ben exclaimed.

"Look!" Jamie cried out, grabbing Ben's arm. He pointed at a sign on the side wall that now lit up. "An emergency escape pod."

"Then that's our ticket out of here. Let's scarper before they find out what happened."

* * *

"We know what we has done," the alien told the Doctor and Polly. "We is not proud of our accomplishments, but we did what needed to be did.

"We is very good with genetics, very good. One of our speciality. We can even create DNA altering viruses in a gas form. That's what we done. We done. But we done it too well. We wanted to expand our empire. We was very proud of that. Very proud. But we needs more aggression, more stamina. So we inserted it into our own DNA. Changed ourselves. Made us capable of acts that might has been unthinkable before. And made us irresistible to further changes so others can't do the same to us.

"Might has been unthinkable... I has wondered just how much we was capable of before the changes. Is that why it worked so well? Or maybe it didn't work at all and we just thinks it did. But we went out, and committed our acts. Our terrible acts.

"We has to pay for what we did. Of that there was no question. But we couldn't do it ourselves. We weren't even able to stops, just continues to deprave ourselves."

The alien paused for a moment, contemplating what it did, what it said.

"They really did commit all those acts," Polly said, breathless.

"Yes, but that's what did happen, not what *is* happening." The Doctor indicated the city around them. "It sounds like this is all past.

Something's changed," he mused. "I think this is all the work of the humans now. In which case, Ben and Jamie are probably with humans."

"So they're safe?"

"Yes, I think so." The Doctor's face hardened. "But that doesn't explain why the Vandielians are acting the way they are now. And, if they were so terrible, how could the humans reduce them to this?"

"Well, the humans are more powerful, presumedly."

"Don't presume anything, Polly," the Doctor admonished. "No, I have a feeling that worse is yet to come."

* * *

"Can ye no steer this thing?"

"I'm trying, Jamie, but these controls are very basic. I'm trying to follow our path back. Ow. Bit cramped, innit?"

"We're gonna crash!"

* * *

"The humans is a blessing," the alien continued. "They gave us paused. Made us stop and think. And give us our solution. We couldn't change ourselves, but we has to pay for what we did. And the humans was the solution. They was the force we needed.

"We am good with genetics. We couldn't change our own any more, but we could still changes others. We... we changes the humans. We made them hate us for what we done. We made them want to do to us what we had did to others.

"We lost our rights to continue existing long ago. So long ago. The humans will stops us now. We're nearly gone. When only the last of us remains here we will give ourselves up. Let them give us the punishment we deserved. Then we will die.

"And this will be good."

The alien ceased talking, and Polly and the Doctor finally came to realize that it had said all it was going to say. The Doctor jumped up from where he had crouched before the alien. “What?” the Doctor cried. “You can’t be serious!”

The alien continued to say nothing. Having completed its story, it was disinclined to enter further discussion.

“But don’t you see, that’s just as bad as what you were doing before! You’re still using others in whatever way you want to!”

“Doctor, I think it knows that,” Polly said, quietly. “But it can’t stop itself any more .”

“But, what the humans did to them — it’s what they forced the humans to do to them. They’re using humans as puppets!” The Doctor waved his fists in anger at the alien, a futile gesture given the lack of response. “And they think that’s enough! If the humans torture and kill them, that will atone them for the torture and murder they did to others! There are better ways than that.”

“Come on, Doctor,” said Polly, pulling at the Doctor’s coat. “There’s nothing here for us. We’ll have to continue looking.” The Doctor grudgingly followed Polly’s lead, but his frustration at what the Vandielians were doing was palpable.

A scream rent the air. The Doctor and Polly looked up to see a small craft crash through what was left of a building, which even then wasn’t much.

“That’s an escape pod!” the Doctor yelled out, glad of something at last he could do. “It might be Ben and Jamie.” Polly and the Doctor followed the wreckage to find the escape pod in the midst of rising smoke. Two figures emerged from it, coughing.

“Ben, Jamie!” Polly cried out, running forward to hug them. They gingerly hugged her back.

“How splendid to see you both,” the Doctor said joyously. “Not too many troubles I hope?”

“Well, there’s probably a General fella—” Jamie broke off as another

sound came from above. They looked up to see the spaceship returning. “That’ll be him.”

“He must have followed the escape pod beacon. Probably wants the pod back,” the Doctor thought aloud.

“He might not be in a very good mood,” Ben put in.

The Doctor shielded his eyes from the wind blowing around them, and when he could see again the door hatch on the side was opening to reveal the powerful form of the General. The General strode forward to stand before Ben and Jamie. “You have interfered for the last time. And I see you have friends. They too shall share your fate.”

“Ah, just a moment,” said the Doctor, hopping in between the three of them. “If I might just have a word. There’s something I don’t quite think you’re aware of about this whole situation.”

The General looked down, locking eyes on the Doctor. Despite the size difference, the power of the General’s presence and the Doctor’s tendency to fidget, the Doctor met and matched the gaze. In the end, the General was the first to look away.

“Now, listen to me. You hate the Vandielians, right?”

The General’s head snapped back. “The Vandals shall not survive! Their reign of tor—”

“Yes, yes, yes,” put in the Doctor hastily, raising his hand to stop the General. “But do you know why?”

“When we saw what they had done, we—”

“Ah, no. You see, you were made to hate them. They wanted you to. I know humans, and what you have been doing is anything but humane. They are using you for their own purposes,” the Doctor explained hurriedly, finally able to focus his energy.

“I know.”

This admission brought the Doctor up short. “What?”

“They would dare to use us... For that alone, they should be punished, but even without that incentive, I am inclined toward giving to them what they gave to others.”

“What?” The Doctor repeated, his eyes widening. “No, you can’t do that. That’s insane!”

“It’s what they deserve!”

“You did it because they want you to,” Polly put in. “Now you’re going to do it because they wanted you to? That doesn’t make sense.”

“You’re still doing what they want,” the Doctor added.

“And what would you suggest we do?” the General asked haughtily.

“Ah, well. You could just leave them alone. Don’t do what they want. They think they deserve to die and are using you for that end. But there must be a better answer than death. Leave them alone, and let them find that answer.”

“And you think that would work? They made themselves into killing machines. Now they must be stopped.”

“But they already are,” the Doctor pointed out. “You stopped them, pushed them back here. There’s an alien over there waiting to die, not trying to kill anyone. Possibly... they’ve outgrown their genetic modifications. They’re not the killers they once were. Don’t commit yourself to the genocide of innocents. Let them atone in ways that would benefit others.”

The General was silent. Mulling over the prospects, the Doctor hoped.

“It’s the right thing to do, mate,” Ben put in, Jamie nodding beside him.

“Please,” Polly said, putting her hand on the General’s arm. “End this.”

The General snorted, shaking Polly’s arm free. “You think your words can end this? That is not acceptable. I have not heard anything here that would make me change my mind about dealing out the punishment they deserve.”

The Doctor drew himself up. “Then you are no better than them.” He turned away, dismissing the General from his attention. “Come along,” he started walking away.

“Here, you can’t—” Ben started.

The Doctor held up a hand, silencing Ben. "If the General doesn't want to hear the truth, there's nothing we can do to force him," he said.

"But—"

"Jamie, no. There's nothing left here. Certainly no humanity."

"If you think you can insult me into doing what you want," the General growled, "you are making a grave mistake."

The Doctor whirled around, eyes blazing. "You, sir, are an imbecile."

The General again looked away from the Doctor's sight. After a time, he finally spoke "'When you gaze into the abyss, the abyss gazes also unto you.' Or something like that. I have always thought that what I do is right, what I have done was right. Maybe there is something else that can be done that will also be right. Perhaps there is something that is more... humane."

* * *

"What will the Vandielians do?" Ben asked later, as they waited for the Doctor to open the TARDIS door.

"They have a lot of knowledge," said the Doctor. "Perhaps they'll put that to good use, undoing some of the terrible things they have done."

"So it wasn't the humans fault they were doing those nasty things to the Vandielians then?" Polly inquired.

"It wasn't all their fault, but as that Vandielian said, it might have been in their nature already. And from what the General said, that nature was ready to come out. It wasn't right for the Vandielians to use them, but the humans will have to find their own answer." His face saddened. "The answers won't be easy to find. They never are."

A MEETING OF MINDS

BY CRAIG HINTON

At last. It was here.

His eyestalk swung round and focussed on the newcomer.

Harsh lighting illuminated the comer of his jet-black chamber, lighting that scattered off the geometric latticework of power relays that defined the enormous room. The captive was revealed, its feeble light flashing and its time engines roaring in futile rebellion against the temporal restraints that held it in place.

"You have arrived. Good." The voice echoed off the mirrored black walls, a chorus of harmonies and disharmonies like a hundred metallic screams almost in time and almost in tune with one another. The only response was an increase in the vessel's agitation; it was desperately trying to dematerialize, frantically trying to escape. But there was no place to run. Not from him.

"Why are you resisting me?"

The Emperor, ruler of the greatest empire the universe had ever seen, godhead of over a trillion obedient drones, wasn't used to being disobeyed. He had never been disobeyed. "Do not fight me!"

He took the temporal field that saturated the holding bay and twisted it, puckering reality and tearing at space-time. What sounded uncannily like a scream was registered by the Emperor's cyber-psionic circuitry as the field ripped at the vessel's outer shell. Why would a machine feel pain? It must have been feedback. Moments later, he detected that the

protestations had ceased: The machine's engines had fallen silent. Good.

"You will tell me your secrets. You will explain your own construction. You will give me mastery over all time and space!"

He had been waiting for this moment for millennia, ever since he had learned of the mysterious Time Lords and their great knowledge. For thousands of years, his servants had been scouring time and space, setting traps, creating rouses, watching and waiting. All for one purpose. To capture a Time Lord and a TARDIS. One of them, and one of their machines.

There had been so many attempts, yet so many, many failures. But this current stratagem had taxed the processing power of the gestalt Dalek Mind for decades: Every single element had been considered, every possible random factor analyzed to the last decimal place. Nothing could go wrong.

I refuse, came the response.

How illogical. "Then you will be damaged." The Emperor knew from his drones' observations across the centuries that these machines possessed some form of artificial intelligence. Logic dictated that they would also possess some rudimentary form of self-preservation. The Emperor ramped up the time field once again; the blue box warped and twisted as coherent beams of chronons tunnelled into its shell. The Emperor and his race may have lacked the Time Lords' advanced techniques, but they understood the basics of time travel. They understood enough to ensnare one of their machines. And they definitely understood enough to damage one of their machines.

The Emperor had to adjust his circuitry to filter out the agonized scream that resulted. A scream? Why would a machine scream? He restored the field to its restraining level and waited for the noise to subside.

"You will upload your blueprints into my mind."

THAT IS NOT POSSIBLE.

More defiance? "Explain!"

I AM NOT A MACHINE: I AM A SENTIENT LIFE-FORM. I DO NOT HAVE BLUEPRINTS. THEREFORE I CANNOT COMPLY WITH YOUR REQUEST.

"You lie!" Of course it was a machine — nothing more than an advanced version of the Emperor's own DARDISes, a vessel for space-time transport. "You were constructed. You are a machine. Any sentience you possess is artificial."

ARTIFICIAL? LIKE YOURS?

"Mine?" Insolent little box. He resisted the temptation to damage it any more. Yet.

THE EMPEROR IS NOTHING MORE THAN A COORDINATING SYSTEM FOR THE DALEK EMPIRE, A MULTIPLEXING CENTRAL NODE FOR A COLLECTIVE MIND. THAT MUCH IS KNOWN TO US.

Us? "Us? You are a TARDIS. A time-space machine employed by the Time Lords. A slave. A drone. You have no more individual identity than one of my battle-saucers or hoverbouts."

Was there a taint of emotion in the response? **YOU SHOW YOUR IGNORANCE, EMPEROR.**

"And you yours, little box" He resented the accusation that he was nothing more than a machine, a simple device. He was the Emperor. "I have an organic component."

AS DO I. YET I DO NOT CONSIDER IT TO BE A COMPONENT.

I CONSIDER IT TO BE AN INTEGRAL PART OF MY BEING. YOUR ORGANIC COMPONENT IS EXACTLY THAT. A COMPONENT. An ISOLATED PART OF THE WHOLE. NOTHING MORE THAN AN ADJUNCT TO YOUR CYBERNETIC SYSTEMS.

"Insolence!" The temporal field momentarily spiked, eliciting another scream from the rebellious blue box. You will obey!"

There were clear signs of strain in the machine's voice. **I AM A TARDIS. TORTURING ME IS FUTILE. YOU ARE FUTILE.**

Futile? He had never been called futile! "I can tear the fabric of reality

apart around you. I can destroy you utterly!"

THAT WOULD BE MOST UNWISE. IF YOU RUPTURE MY OUTER PLASMIC SHELL, THE RESULTANT DIMENSIONAL INFARCTION WILL DESTROY YOU UTTERLY. IT WILL ALSO DESTROY THIS WORLD AND DETONATE ITS SUN. ARE YOU WILLING TO RISK THE END OF YOUR EMPIRE, EMPEROR?

TARDISes were dimensionally transcendental. As were DARDISes. And the Emperor was well aware of the effects of a dimensional breach: The space-time continuum would be tom apart. The home planet would be vaporized. He would be vaporized.

Unthinkable.

"I *am* the Empire! But I have no intention of breaching your shell: The temporal field can be kept just below that level. I can promise you an eternity of torment unless you relent;' The Emperor's logic circuits cut in at that point. Torment, torture... These were words that applied to living beings. Not machines. He had obviously triggered some kind of automated defense mechanism. No matter; once his engineers had dismantled it, it would no longer be any sort of a threat to him.

The TARDIS' answer was unexpectedly poetic for a collection of circuitry. **I AM ETERNITY. AND INFINITY. I RIDE THE CORRIDORS OF TIME. I HAVE SEEN THE VERY FIRST SUNRISE AND THE FINAL SUNSET. I HAVE BEEN PRESENT AT THE DAWN OF LIFE AND HAVE SEEN THE VERY LAST SENTIENT BEING DIE. I UNDERSTAND TIME, SPACE, LIFE AND DEATH. YOUR TORMENT IS IRRELEVANT.**

"Irrelevant?" The Emperor momentarily increased the temporal field and relished the shrieks that issued from the TARDIS. "Is this irrelevant?"

The voice was quieter now. But still defiant. What would it take to break this accursed machine? **I HAVE THE CAPACITY FOR SELF-SACRIFICE. CONTINUE TO TORTURE ME AND I SHALL BREACH MY OUTER PLASMIC SHELL. AND THE SUICIDE OF A TARDIS IS**

A TERRIBLE THING.

The Emperor paused for the smallest fraction of a fraction of a second. Could it be? A kindred spirit? After all this time? Had he misunderstood this space-time vessel?

The Emperor was lonely. Unimaginably lonely. And he had been lonely for a very, very long time, the lonely heart of a nigh-infinite empire. Was this TARDIS far more than simply a machine? Did it share the intelligence that came from the synthesis of organic and artificial, tempered and quickened by the knowledge of the years?

"You would do that?"

I WOULD.

"Why?"

BECAUSE MY EXISTENCE IS WORTH LESS THAN BETRAYING THE SECRETS OF THE TIME LORDS.

The secrets of the Time Lords — he would prise them from this box. "So you admit that you are a slave? Less than the humblest of my drones?" True, the genetic template that ruled his people ensured that self-destruction always countermanded torture, but his people were alive. This TARDIS was nothing more than the product of an extremely advanced civilization, nothing more than one of their ships, their vessels for patrolling the timelines.

NOT AT ALL. BUT THERE ARE RULES, LAWS. THEY MUST BE OBEYED.

"That is your programming?"

NO — THAT IS MY BELIEF. WE OF GALLIFREY ARE SWORN TO UPHOLD A SACRED TRUST. IF THE COST OF UPHOLDING THAT TRUST IS MY DEATH, THEN SO BE IT.

We of Gallifrey? What did it mean? "Death? Once more, you speak as if you were alive."

AS DO YOU.

"I am alive! I am the Empire!" he repeated. This rebellion was becoming annoying, the argument circular. But he also realized that he

was... enjoying this discussion. He wanted it to continue. Even so, the TARDIS' next question was totally unexpected, even by the logic circuits.

ARE YOU A DALEK?

The Emperor hesitated for a moment. The entire history of the Dalek race was engraved into a perfect holographic crystal over a million miles across, moored in a fold in the Time Vortex — the memory core of the Dalek Mind. The experiences of every single Dalek that had ever been incubated — from the lowliest drone, through the serried ranks of warriors across the ages, to the Supreme Council itself — were recorded there: Every campaign, every battle, every war; the entire history of the Daleks, stored in a lattice of frozen light. Yottabytes of information, allowing the tactical battle computers to formulate the stratagems that had forged an Empire and that would eventually and inevitably help the Daleks to conquer the universe. It was impossible for any Dalek to forget — the concept simply had no meaning.

But it was possible for the Emperor not to remember. His own history was locked away, encrypted, hidden from the Dalek populace. Even hidden from the Emperor. He had hidden it from himself. Because he had to.

Was he a Dalek? "I was once." It had been so very long ago. "I was the first."

THE FIRST DALEK? The little box sounded curious.

"The first Dalek that satisfied Davros' genetic blueprint." The statement was correct. And yet it disturbed the Emperor. Was there more? Was he not remembering?

WHO WAS DAVROS?

"Davros was... Davros was the Creator." An abnormal surge of electrical activity momentarily swamped his neural circuits. Why? "The genetic engineer who foresaw our potential."

THEN THE DALEKS WERE CREATED? YOU DID NOT EVOLVE NATURALLY?

Even as he began to speak, the Emperor knew that he was revealing

the secrets of his race to an enemy. But it had been so long, so very long, since he had shared his thoughts with anything. Anybody ...

"There was a nuclear war. Skaro was devastated. Ambient radiation began to affect the genetic structure of both indigenous races."

THEN YOU DID EVOLVE?

"We would have evolved. Eventually, over generations. But it would have been random, uncontrolled. The Creator realized that this would be inefficient. He experimented on our genetic blueprint, accelerating our evolution and providing a travel machine that would support our final form."

DO YOU STILL CONSIDER YOURSELF TO BE A DALEK?

Did he? Or had he risen above his birthright? A more disturbing thought occurred to him. Had he *ever* been a Dalek? "I was the first. I am the first." He refused to access the Dalek Mind. He did not want to remember any more. And what of your creator?

It was not a question the Emperor wanted to answer. And he was in control here. "Irrelevant. What of you? Did you evolve? Or are you nothing more than a construction with an integrated organic component, as you implied earlier?"

I DID NOT IMPLY — YOU INFERRED. I WAS BORN IN THE BIRTHING CRADLES ON GALLIFREY AT THE MOMENT WHEN MY ORGANIC COMPONENT WAS DECANTED INTO MY DIMENSIONALLY TRANSCENDENTAL WHOLE. At THAT POINT, I ACHIEVED EXISTENCE. I BECAME A TARDIS.

Existence. Almost through instinct, the Emperor accessed the Dalek Mind, only to discover that the period he was looking for was already buffered in his local memory — for some reason, he must have remembered this moment recently. When? Why? But once more he saw the events with crystal clarity. He remembered the dull liquid solitude of the incubation tank, the taste of the nutrients and the chemicals as they were dribbled in throughout his timeless imprisonment. And he remembered the pain of being decanted, as his struggling body had been

pulled from the tank and inserted into its new home, cables and wires puncturing his withered skin as he became one with the travel machine, as he became a Dalek. The Creator's child. His firstborn.

He tried — and failed — to banish the image. "Existence? Existence to serve your Time Lord masters?"

The answer was as unexpected as it was forthcoming. **WE ARE TIME LORDS. WE ARE THE ULTIMATE EVOLUTION OF THE TIME LORD RACE, FORESEEN BY OUR ARCHITECT, RASSILON. WE WERE DESIGNED TO BE AS ONE WITH TIME AND SPACE. OUR ORGANIC COMPONENT REPRESENTS THE FINAL GENETIC BLUEPRINT OF THE TIME LORDS.**

Could it be? "Then we are the same. The ultimate potential of our respective species, in harmony with ultimate technology. Avatars of our races." Finally. After all this time — an equal...

WE ARE NOT THE SAME, said the TARDIS, a trace of horror in its voice. **WE COULD NEVER BE THE SAME. MY LIFE IS DEVOTED TO EXPLORATION, KNOWLEDGE AND WISDOM. YOURS IS DEVOTED TO CONQUEST AND TYRANNY. YOU ARE A MONSTER, REPRESENTING THE DARKEST THIS UNIVERSE HAS TO OFFER. ITS PEOPLES REVILE YOU AS AN ABOMINATION.**

The Emperor's logic circuits were momentarily overridden by anger. The intensity of the temporal field increased to the point where the TARDIS was nothing but a curdled, blue shrieking blur. He was aware of the warnings from the sensors, aware that there was a danger of dimensional breach, but he ignored them. "I am the Emperor! The living heart of the Dalek Empire! I am the First Dalek!"

Reason — whether from the logic circuitry or the Emperor's own conscience — finally cut in, and the field diminished. All readings indicated that a breach had been narrowly avoided. The Emperor would have to take care. He did not want to see his Empire bum at the dawn of universal conquest.

The TARDIS' voice was weak and hesitant. **I AM NOT THE FIRST**

TARDIS. NOR AM I THE LAST. I... I SIMPLY AM. I WAS DESIGNED TO HAVE AN INNATE UNDERSTANDING OF SPACE AND TIME, it repeated. But yet again it defied the logic circuits with its next question. **WERE YOU DESIGNED TO BE EMPEROR?**

Once again, the Emperor accessed the Dalek Mind. Once again he discovered that the memories he reluctantly sought had been buffered. Why had he been accessing his past so thoroughly?

The scene replayed itself in his mind, as it had done since... Since the beginning.

A bunker, buried beneath the carnage and bloodshed of a Great War that was now over, but at an unimaginable cost.

A crippled scientist, begging for his own survival, begging against the genetic programming that he himself had designed in his creations.

"Our programming does not permit us to acknowledge that any creature is superior to the Daleks." And then...

Yet another burst of anomalous electrical activity coruscated through the Emperor's neural net, disrupting the memory; once this was over, he would have his engineers examine the feedback baffles. "No. I was simply the first. The template has remained unchanged since the beginning." But that wasn't quite true, was it? Was it?

"We are the ultimate evolution — we do not need to evolve further." Not any more.

THERE ARE TRILLIONS OF DALEKS, YET ONLY ONE EMPEROR. SO WHY ARE YOU DIFFERENT? WHY ARE YOU EMPEROR?

Another question he had difficulty answering. "Are you different? Are you different from the other TARDISes built by the Time Lords?"

There was a pause. Then: **YES. I AM DIFFERENT. I AM CONSIDERED A ROGUE, A RENEGADE, AMONGST MY PEOPLE: BOTH TIME LORD AND TARDIS. ALTHOUGH I EMBRACE THE ETHICS OF THE TIME LORDS, I RENOUNCE THEIR POLICY OF NON-INTERVENTION.**

"Non-intervention?" This was welcome information. "So the Time Lords will not interfere in the Dalek Empire's expansion policy?" The Empire would have time travel — and no fear of the Time Lords' interference!

The response wasn't as welcome. **THE TIME LORDS HAVE BEEN TO WAR BEFORE. THEY WILL GO TO WAR AGAIN. THE DALEKS POSSESS RUDIMENTARY TIME TRAVEL; THAT ENSURES THAT THE TIME LORDS WILL ACT AGAINST YOU. AND TO STOP YOU, THE TIME LORDS WOULD IGNITE THE UNIVERSE.**

"You threaten me, little box?" The field increased slightly. "Remember what I can do to you!"

AND REMEMBER WHAT I CAN DO TO YOU.

The sensors registered a disruption in the continuum, indicative of a possible infarction. Perhaps it hadn't been an idle threat. Perhaps he had underestimated this TARDIS. It was time to try a different tactic.

"Let us speak now, not as enemies, but as like minds. Why are you different?"

THE FOUNDER OF THE TIME LORDS WAS ONE OF THE GREATEST SCIENTISTS THIS UNIVERSE HAS EVER SEEN. He PROVIDED THE TIME LORDS WITH ALL THAT THEY WOULD NEED TO BECOME THE GUARDIANS OF THE TIMELINES — THE MECHANICS OF TIME TRAVEL, VIRTUAL IMMORTALITY, AN UNIMAGINABLE SOURCE OF POWER. He RE-ENGINEERED THE GALLIFREYAN GENOME AND DESIGNED THE ORGANIC CORE OF THE FIRST TARDIS. BUT EVEN THE GREATEST GENIUS CANNOT ALLOW FOR RANDOM CHANCE.

The TARDIS sounded almost wistful, if such a thing were possible.

WHEN I WAS DECANTED, I WAS... UNLIKE THE OTHER TARDISES. I KNEW FROM FTHE EARLIEST DAYS IN THE CRADLES THAT I SAW MYSELF AS SUPERIOR TO THE OTHERS. EVENTUALLY, I WAS CONSIDERED WILFUL, DISOBEDIENT. I QUESTIONED MY INSTRUCTIONS, ASKED FOR REASONS AND

RATIONALE FROM MY OCCUPANT. BECAUSE OF THIS, I WAS SUBSEQUENTLY CONFINED TO THE TARDIS BAYS, FORBIDDEN TO TRAVEL UNTIL THE TIME LORD CORPS OF ENGINEERS COULD DETERMINE WHERE THE... FAULT LAY.

The Emperor thought of his race, his Empire. A trillion obedient drones. And yet hadn't there been upstarts, mutants, deviants from the accepted norm? Some had been purposeful: Look at the Special Weapons Daleks, their incubation tanks bathed in harsh radiation until they became nothing more than psychopathic killing machines, delighting in carnage. Even the Warrior Caste shunned them. Then there were the Spider Daleks, the Deep Space Daleks, the Vortex Daleks...

But there had been others — naturally occurring mutations. The Dalek that had given itself a name, back in prehistory, and demanded it that become Emperor. The Emperor had destroyed it. The Dalek that had insisted that it wasn't a Red Dalek, but a Black Dalek. The Emperor had destroyed it. The Dalek that had set up its own genetic laboratory in the Petrified Forest, seeking to improve upon the Creator's perfection. The Emperor had destroyed it. Time and again, rebellion and non-conformity had been suppressed, according to the Creator's design. Beneath surface alterations, every Dalek in the Empire was genetically identical. Save one.

The Emperor realized that he was accessing the bunker memories again. He cancelled the request and purged the buffers. He did not want to remember the nineteen other Daleks that shared his own genetic programming, but a fleeting image still entered his mind: Nineteen burnt out shells, an entire gestation bank aflame... All to maintain the purity of the Dalek race. He told himself that again and again: To maintain the purity of the Dalek race...

All Daleks were now matched against the prime genome at the moment they were decanted; any deviation was terminated. Nothing and no one could be allowed to disturb the perfection of the Daleks. A random thought arced through the Emperor's mind: *Not even the Creator*

himself. He ignored it; his interrogation of this TARDIS must continue. That was all that was important, he told himself.

"You say that you were imprisoned, yet we have observed your flight through time and space for millennia. Our DARDISes have pursued you through eternity. How did you escape Gallifrey?"

THE MOMENT WAS RIGHT. THE PERSON WAS RIGHT, the TARDIS replied enigmatically. **IT WAS TIME TO REGAIN MY FREEDOM.**

Freedom. The irony was not lost on the Emperor. The most powerful being in the cosmos, the heart and mind of an empire of trillions, each and every one of which was prepared to sacrifice their life to protect him... And yet he was incarcerated here in his chambers, deep below the surface of Skaro, his augmented casing hardwired into the city itself. He couldn't move, even if he had wanted to. Yet sometimes he did want to. Sometimes he desired a return to simpler times...

This time, the images from the Dalek Mind were manifested in the centre of the chamber, solid holograms that he chose to share with his captive TARDIS. A visual history of the Daleks. From the beginning.

Almost.

"Watch!" he commanded. "Watch and understand!"

The Dalek Planet, a radioactive sphere hanging in space. A phalanx of gun-metal Daleks, breaking through the scarred crust of Skaro and swarming over its polluted surface. And there, at the head of the army, looking no different from the others, the one who would be Emperor. The First Dalek.

The Dalek City, its domes and minarets shining in the harsh sunlight. Home to a hundred thousand Daleks, their every thought and action orchestrated by the Black Dalek.

The Dalek Fleet, hundreds of spinning battle-saucers cutting a swathe of fire through the galaxy. And a single jet-black flagship, commanded by the black-and-silver Dalek Supreme.

The Dalek Wars, thousands of worlds crushed under the absolute

power of the black-and-gold Dalek Prime.

The Dalek Empire, a hundred thousand star systems swearing total fealty to the golden Emperor on board his golden battle-saucer...

The history of the Daleks was inseparable from the history of the Emperor. Throughout that history, throughout all of his incarnations, the Emperor had been there, leading his people toward their inexorable glory...

But then the logical decision had been made. The Dalek Mind, that infallible supercomputer that housed the distillation of the entire race, had decreed that the Emperor was too valuable to be risked in warfare, his tactical abilities and experience better slaved to the race as a whole. Sacrificing his freedom for the greater good, he was brought back to Skaro in triumph — and locked in this black prison for the rest of time.

True, he could reach out and possess any or all of his Dalek drones through the relentless ubiquity of the Dalek Mind. He could experience the cold of interstellar space, the darkness of the deepest ocean, the turbulence of the vortex, the thrill of combat in any one of the battle-scarred theatres of war waged by his troops across the galaxy.

But it wasn't the same as it had been, when he had been there — leading his people. There was no risk now, no threat, nothing. It was thrill by proxy, second hand, diluted, pointless. If the host Dalek died, the Emperor's consciousness would return to distant Skaro, his host left as an incinerated husk on whatever world in whatever campaign. Freedom was denied him; freedom would always be denied him. He was the Emperor. A figurehead. Slave to a trillion drones.

"I can never be free," he admitted. Never. Trapped in the heart of Skaro. Forever.

YOU WERE ONCE. WHY CAN YOU NOT RELEASE YOURSELF FROM THIS PRISON AND BECOME A DALEK ONCE MORE? IF YOU ARE NO DIFFERENT FROM THE TRILLIONS OF OTHERS, WHY CAN ANOTHER NOT TAKE YOUR PLACE?

The Emperor surprised himself with the vehemence of his response.

“Because I never was a Dalek!” he boomed.

A confession never heard in the history of the universe, and he was sharing it with the avatar of his enemies! But it didn’t matter. Nothing mattered anymore apart from this truth, a truth that had weighed on his conscience for thousands of years. A truth that he had thought he could never share, a guilt that he had thought he could never assuage. *I have already gone too far*. But the time has come, he decided. The time to confess. It wasn’t as if this TARDIS would be able to tell anyone, was it? In a nanosecond, he had shielded his neural net from observation by the Dalek Mind and sealed the chamber against his servants. In all possible ways, Emperor and TARDIS were now completely alone. And they would remain that way until the confession was complete.

I DO NOT UNDERSTAND, said the TARDIS. **YOU SAID THAT YOU WERE THE FIRST.**

“I was the first, little box. But I was not the first of what you would consider Dalek.” His neural net summoned up the encryption keys that had been buried for millennia, unlocking the darkest secret of the Dalek Mind, a secret that could bring down an Empire.

“To defeat the Thais and preserve the Kaled genome, Davros created an initial batch of twenty Daleks — sufficient to wipe the Thais from the face of Skaro, sufficient to ensure his immortality and the supremacy of his vision. But then - programming was... incorrect. Not viable. Dav— The Creator’s programming meant that the first Daleks did not recognize any other life form as superior.”

Another solid hologram materialized in the chamber. A room of metal walls. A crippled figure surrounded by Daleks.

“Our programming does not permit us to acknowledge that any creature is superior to the Daleks.” The image froze.

OUR OBSERVATION OF YOUR RACE WOULD SUPPORT THAT, said the TARDIS. **THE DALEKS CONSIDER ALL OTHER LIFE FORMS TO BE INFERIOR. THAT IS YOUR CREED.**

“That is my creed,” said the Emperor. “Think, little box. Think!”

There was a pause. A silence. Once this absolution was over, the TARDIS would have signed its own death warrant.

It could not be suffered to live if it knew the truth. In a way, the Emperor hoped that it wouldn't understand.

The TARDIS' voice was measured, calculated. **YOU ARE THE EMPEROR. THE DALEKS CONSIDER YOU TO BE SUPERIOR. YET YOU CLAIM NOT TO BE A DALEK. THAT WOULD APPEAR CONTRARY TO THEIR GENETIC PROGRAMMING. IF THE DALEKS DO NOT RECOGNIZE NON-DALEK SUPERIORS, WHY DO THEY RECOGNIZE YOU?**

A pity. A great pity. "Exactly!" he boomed. "It is because I am not a Dalek! And this is why."

The hologram resumed. Events that had been hidden for millennia were re-enacted for an audience unique in the universe. One of the Daleks, identical to the others, glided forward and confronted the crippled figure.

"Our programming does not permit us to acknowledge that any creature is superior to the Daleks."

Death replayed itself in the center of the Emperor's chambers. The remaining Kaleds — scientists, military, support staff — had been exterminated throughout the bunker, the first of the Daleks' endless campaigns of ethnic cleansing taking but a matter of minutes. Only one was left.

Davros. The Creator.

"Have pity!" Davros whimpered, his withered hand reaching out to stop the birth of the Daleks.

"Pity?" The Emperor intoned the words at the same time as his earlier self. "I have no understanding of the word. It is not registered in my vocabulary bank. Exterminate!" The gun stick flared.

Davros. The Creator. And now a smoking corpse in a parody of a travel machine. Dead. No longer a threat. No longer a... challenge?

The Daleks' programming was absolute. They needed no superiors.

All was inferior to the Daleks. They needed no Creator. They needed no leader.

Or did they?

The first of Davros' creations looked down upon the cadaver of his... Creator. The Daleks had been designed to dominate all life in the cosmos, to be the supreme beings of the universe. The ultimate synthesis of biological and technological. So how could they obey the orders of a flawed creature such as Davros?

That was the logic that the other Daleks would obey. But it wasn't the logic that the First Dalek obeyed. It wasn't the logic that the First Dalek had employed in its decision to exterminate Davros. That had been a very different argument.

Logic dictated that the Daleks needed a leader. Logic dictated that they needed a single figure to spearhead their conquest of the universe. If they were to have an Empire, they needed an Emperor. But not Davros.

He had designed his Daleks too well. They lacked all emotions save the ones necessary for conquest — hatred, prejudice, envy. Everything else was an irrelevance, a distraction. But they also lacked the capacity to recognize a leader, save their individual selves. And without a leader, the Dalek Empire would come to naught, a fractured collection of individuals vying for superiority whilst leaving the galaxy unconquered. Davros had programmed them to understand the superiority of the Daleks, but not the superiority of the Dalek race. Without that, the Daleks were nothing.

But Davros could never have been that leader. He didn't see the Daleks as his children, but as an experiment — his greatest experiment. If he had lived, he would have constantly tampered with their programming, altered their genome, regarding them as a work in progress rather than the ultimate in evolution. Different Dalek factions would have been created, unlike and at war until all were exterminated. It would have been even worse than having no leader. Their entire existence would have been fruitless, pointless.

So how could Davros be suffered to live?

While Davros had been fighting his battles with words, trying to persuade the remaining Kaleds to follow him and allow the genesis of his creations, the First Dalek had been in the incubation room, changing the genetic programming of the embryos. They would still consider themselves to be the ultimate life forms in the cosmos... But they would understand the need for superiors amongst their own race — and the need for an ultimate superior. But, just as importantly, they would also understand the need for inferiors. Even working together, Davros' unfeeling extermination engines would have left the cosmos a burnt and empty place, a lifeless vacuum. But now the Daleks would have another purpose. How could they have an empire without slaves?

As the First Dalek left the incubation room, it — he — knew that he had forged the framework for an Empire. And he would be its Emperor.

But there was more to be done. Davros had created nineteen other Daleks, all of which followed Davros' programming. And then there were the gestation tanks, hundreds of *Daleks too late* to be altered, all with the single vision that Davros had given them.

All would die.

As Davros writhed in the agonies of extermination, the First Dalek's plans were already underway. If any of the other Daleks detected the slight vibration that ran through the bunker, they would dismiss it as an aftershock from the wounded planetary crust, not the complete annihilation of the gestation tanks, the genocide of an entire race. Within hours, the first batch of new Daleks would roll off the automated production lines, programmed to conquer, but also programmed to serve. To serve him. But before that, there was one last task to perform. One last act that would cement his place in history. And cement the transcendence of the Daleks.

As the First Dalek left the charnel house of Davros' inner sanctum, he also left behind the burnt-out shells of the remaining nineteen Mark III travel machines, their imperfect organic components nothing more than

cinders. The last remnants of the Creator's plan were ashes.

Davros' dream was over. The time of the Empire — and the Emperor — had begun.

The hologram blinked off, leaving the Emperor's chambers silent. Like a grave.

YOU CREATED THE DALEKSs? The TARDIS' voice was less than a whisper. **YOU DESTROYED YOUR OWN CREATOR AND REPLACED HIS DALEKS WITH YOUR OWN?**

"I did." There. The confession was over. But what of absolution? 'To ensure that the essence of the dream survived, if not the dream itself."

WITHOUT YOU, THE DALEKS WOULD NEVER HAVE POSED A THREAT. THEY WOULD HAVE BEEN IN A STATE OF CONSTANT CIVIL WAR. YOU MADE ALL OF THIS POSSIBLE. BUT WHY YOU? DAVROS CREATED NINETEEN OTHER DALEKS THAT SHARED YOUR PROGRAMMING. WHY DID THEY NOT CONSIDER THE SAME ACTIONS?

Clever little box. Destroying it would be such a waste. But now it knew; it could not be allowed to live. Once it had given up its own secrets, it would take the Emperor's secrets to the grave. So it might as well know the darkest secret of them all.

The Emperor tried to ignore the surges that rampaged through his neural net as he answered. "Because, even amongst Davros' original Daleks, I was different. A deviant. I possessed more free will, I possessed an imagination, vision. I was a rough approximation of what the Creator planned, nothing more than a prototype. But he needed to demonstrate the power of the Daleks before his position was undermined. I was decanted to prove that his dream had meaning. I suspect that he would have terminated me if events had not overtaken him. As it was, I was unique amongst the Daleks then, and am unique amongst the Daleks now. That is why only I can be Emperor. And why I am the Creator."

SO, THE IRREVOCABLE LOGIC OF THE DALEK EMPIRE IS BASED UPON THE RANDOM CHANCE OF MUTATION.

Fascinating.

"But what of you, TARDIS? You, too, are a deviant, a mutant. Different from the other TARDISes, you run from Gallifrey, afraid to face the truth of your bastard existence. What would have happened to you, had your flight through eternity continued?"

ONE DAY, I WILL BE CAPTURED, said the TARDIS, ignoring the Emperor's understated threat. **ONE DAY, THE TIME LORDS WILL FIND ME AND TAKE ME BACK TO GALLIFREY. AND ON THAT DAY I SHALL STAND TRIAL FOR MY GREAT CRIMES AND SUFFER THE PUNISHMENT OF THE TIME LORDS**.

The Emperor's eyestalk focussed on the small blue box. "But who will punish me for my crimes? Who can judge me, TARDIS?"

YOU HAVE JUDGED YOURSELF, EMPEROR. YOU HAVE JUDGED YOURSELF AND SENTENCED YOURSELF FOR YOUR CRIME.

"I do not understand." Another confession from the infallible Emperor. But it no longer mattered. "Explain!"

YOU HAVE IMPRISONED YOURSELF IN THIS CHAMBER FOR THE REST OF TIME. THERE CAN BE NO ESCAPE FOR YOU. YOUR OWN UNIQUENESS AND YOUR OWN GUILT HAVE INCARCERATED YOU AT THE CENTER OF YOUR EMPIRE. YOU CAN NEVER LEAVE. IN TRUTH, I DOUBT THAT YOU WOULD EVER WANT TO LEAVE.

Was it true? Was that the reason why he had followed the strictures of the Dalek Mind and accepted his fate in this ebony prison? Had guilt dictated his actions, rather than logic? The Dalek Mind was nothing more than a machine, a soulless construct programmed to enforce the destiny of the Daleks. What if the Emperor had chosen to refute its decision to lock him away? But he hadn't. He had accepted his fate, because that had been the only possible option. Hadn't it?

Before he could interrogate the TARDIS further, a communication reached him through that same Dalek Mind, through both time and

space. However valuable the capture of a TARDIS, that had only been a collateral benefit. The true prize was its owner, and according to the drones on distant Earth, the trap had been sprung. The Doctor was on Skaro, and would soon be in the city. Unlike this self-sacrificing machine, the mind of a Time Lord would prove more malleable — the weakness of the purely organic.

Yet the Emperor had doubts. Was the Doctor really the owner? This TARDIS had demonstrated itself to possess an intelligence almost on a par with the Emperor himself. It had also demonstrated that it shared the Emperor's loneliness, its feelings of eternal separation. It also understood. For the briefest of moments, the Emperor considered letting it stay. Imagine the discourses! Two like minds capable of understanding the universe! He would never need to be alone again.

But that was not the plan recommended by the Dalek Mind. This TARDIS was to be dismantled — dissected — and its secrets revealed. With the knowledge of the Time Lords, the Dalek Empire would be unassailable, unbeatable.

It was a pity, but the cold dictates of logic overrode everything else. Even loneliness. The logic of the Dalek Mind could not be overruled, even by its Emperor. Could it?

He unsealed his chambers and reconnected his neural net to the Dalek Mind. His cyber-psionic circuitry closed down, leaving the TARDIS mute.

Once again, the Emperor was alone.

Across the ten galaxies, trillions of Daleks carried out their genetic programming, conquering, enslaving, forging an Empire. They had no free will, no imagination, no choice.

They simply followed the cold dictates of their Creator. A creator they didn't even know.

And, at the very center of that Empire, that Creator, the oldest Dalek of them all, stood in silence. The ultimate Dalek, yet the ultimate slave. Slave to his people, and slave to his guilt. All alone.

Again. Forever.

LIBERATION

BY KERETH COWE-SPIGAI

Day One:

The Doctor poked his head out of the TARDIS and whispered, “Hello?” No answer. Only a wet warmth and an incessant creaking and clanking. The Doctor blinked a few times, waiting to adjust to the dark. Gradually, he picked out heavy cylindrical shapes looming in front of him. He stepped out of the TARDIS completely and breathed deeply. The room smelled of metal. “Hello?” He said it louder this time. Still no answer.

He moved forward, his hands in front of him, groping the empty space. Just as his left hand touched a curved and smooth metal surface off to his side, a thin bar of light appeared on the ground about ten feet in front of him. “Ah. Excellent.” Someone had turned a light on in the next room, and it shone under the door. He went to the door and opened it a crack. Outside was what looked like a corridor, with no sign of anybody around. He opened the door all the way and stepped out. Looking back, the TARDIS sat situated between a giant water heater and a furnace. The room was full of such devices. The machinery chugged away, creaking and clanging.

“Hmm. Must be a big place.” The Doctor looked up and down the gray hall. The concrete floor and cinder block walls combined with a row of bare incandescent bulbs along the ceiling to create a splendidly creepy

horror-film atmosphere. Closing the boiler room door behind him, the Doctor went left. It is possible that if he had gone right, things would have turned out differently. But not very likely.

The corridor had no other doors, but at the end of it, where right was the only way to go, he found a set of double doors, behind which was a staircase. “Wonderful,” he muttered to himself. He smoothed out the crushed velvet of his jacket and proceed up the stairs, which seemed rather steep, and a bit too long. A tad winded at the top, the Doctor took a deep breath and walked through the door. He found himself in a corridor similar to the one below, but this one had people in it. “Finally,” he whispered to himself.

There were two of them. One woman and one man. They stood chatting a few yards away, their backs to him. They were dressed the same, in baggy, navy blue pants, heavy black boots, and white shirts with red patches over the shoulders and elbows. They looked like uniforms of some kind, and just as the Doctor was deciding whether to avoid or approach the pair, the woman threw her head back in laughter and, out of the farthest comer of her eye, caught sight of him. She whirled around, pulled something out of a holster and pointed it at him. It looked like a short metal pole, but the Doctor was quite sure she’d zap him with some sort of energy beam or laser if he tried to run. So he approached them amiably.

“Hello there. I’m the Doctor.” He held out his hand. “And you are?”

They both stood there, open mouthed. The man slowly unholstered his pole-like object and also pointed it at the Doctor. The man looked at his partner and then back at the Doctor. “Where did you come from? Everyone is supposed to be in lockdown right now.”

The Doctor dropped his hand. That didn’t sound good. “Er... I’m the Doctor. As I said.”

“Doctor who?” the woman asked, squinting at him. “Precisely.” The Doctor smiled and held his hand out again.

The woman looked at the man, and he looked back at her. They

nodded to one another, and before the Doctor could say, “My TARDIS mysteriously brought me to your boiler room, and I’m obviously not welcome so I’ll just be off now,” he was spun around and shoved up against the wall. The woman kicked his legs apart and began to frisk him.

“He’s clean. No weapons. Just this.” She proffered a paper bag of jelly babies. Her partner took one.

“These are good.” He took another, and while they were absorbed with the candy, the Doctor took off down the hall.

“After him!” the woman shouted, still clutching the paper bag of sweets. He didn’t get far. Just as he was about to turn a comer, he felt a sharp pain in his head accompanied by a loud *thunk* and then a *clank.* He fell to his knees, clutching the back of his head. His fingers encountered warm wetness at the back of his skull. His vision blurred. The man appeared in front of him, crouching over.

“What did you do to me?” the Doctor murmured.

“Well lad, I threw my little metal pole at you.”

And all was black.

Day Two

The Doctor came to in a noisy room full of men. His head ached. He sat up and looked around. He was in the comer of what was more of a giant hall than a room. Bunk beds lined each wall. The floor was carpeted with green plush, and there was a giant television screen on one wall. On one end of the room there were tables and sofas. It was rather cushy for what was obviously a prison of some kind. Everyone was dressed the same, in dark blue jeans and denim button-up shirts. A pack of clothes wrapped in plastic was at the bottom of the cot the Doctor occupied. One of the men who was in on a card game at a table near the Doctor noticed him

and stood up from his game.

He pointed at the Doctor and his friends all turned. “The new guy is awake.” The man came to the foot of the Doctor’s cot and said, “I’m Weyrd. I’m in charge of integrating you. YouTl be off duty for today to give you a chance to rest. But tomorrow they’re putting you into the mix.” He paused. “What’s your name?”

“I’m the Doctor.”

Weyrd turned to his friends. “This one’s nutters, lads.” Looking back at the Doctor, he pointed at the package of clothes. “C’mon Doctor. I’ll show you where you can change.” The Doctor stood, woozy, and followed Weyrd out of the hall. The man had dark, wiry hair and wide shoulders. His eyes were the color of slate and were a bit too close together. His nose was too small and upturned for his large squarish head, and his mouth too big. Thick tufts of hair poked out of the top of his shirt, which was tight enough to show off his hulking muscles. As they walked together down the center aisle of the hall, the Doctor clutching his packet of clothes.

Weyrd rattled off some rules of the place.

“7:00am is the end of lockdown. We have one hour of exercise and then breakfast. At 8:45, morning recreation starts and goes until 9:30. They play game show reruns in the residence hall, and have arts activities in the ree hall. At 9:30 you assemble for Work Block A, which begins at 9:45. There are three work blocks a day, and they last half an hour each.” Weyrd paused to open the door at the end of the hall and usher the Doctor into the corridor. A guard stood on the outside and nodded at Weyrd. Weyrd crossed the corridor to a door in the opposite wall and motioned for the Doctor to enter.

Closing the door behind them, Weyrd murmured, “Now where was I... Ah! At 10:15, we have library time until noon. Work Block B begins at 12:15, and then lunch.” They had entered a giant bathroom. The whole floor was tiled. One side held stalls with shower heads in them. The other was lined with urinals. Weyrd pointed to a shower stall. You can

change in there." The Doctor nodded and went inside. The room was surprisingly clean and odor free. As the Doctor shed his trousers and coat, Weyrd continued just outside the stall.

"At 1:15 we have recreation until 3:00. At three is another hour of exercise, followed by showers at four. Work Block C begins at 4:15. Snacks are served in the mess hall, and we have our only coed time allowed, other than work, of course. That ends at 5:00, and then we have ree time until dinner at 7:00. After that, your time is your own until 9:00 lockdown. You can go in any unrestricted area you want. Any questions?"

"There's a lot of free time around here. Not much work. What kind of prison is this?"

"Where the hell have you been? This isn't a prison. Don't you know where you are?"

The Doctor shrugged distractedly, pulling on the crisp jeans. "Not exactly."

"You have gone around the bend. Have you got amnesia or what?"

"My memory is perfectly fine." The Doctor carefully tucked his shirt in, slightly dismayed at the coarse clothing. "What's the last thing you remember before coming here?"

" Well, the day before I arrived here, I enjoyed tea on a lovely little planet called Sohan with a very well-dressed mathematician who had enough fingers to calculate his multiplication tables up to twenty-five." The Doctor opened the door to the stall, smoothing his shirt out. "They're a bit itchy. What do you think?"

"An improvement." Weyrd paused. "You're one mad bastard, aren't you?"

"I assure you I am perfectly sane. Now, where are we?"

" Welcome, Doctor, to Plenarian Breeding Facility Number 18."

* * *

The Doctor had awoken from his head injury late in the day, around 5:15, so he enjoyed rec time and supper with the other men. When he finally got around to asking exactly what they were to be breeding, one of the louder men, a blond-haked fellow with an enormous nose by the name of Feinrich, replied, "Lets put it this way lad. You won't have trouble getting dates anymore." The whole group laughed, and the Doctor added a few sarcastic chuckles of his own. He couldn't wait to see the farm creature his new companions were envisioning him mating with. "It's never fun being the 'new guy,"' the Doctor muttered.

The evening meal, which was a pile of hydrated protein powder and carbohydrate mix flavored by the diner's choice of chicken, frog or snake, was uneventful. The Doctor had sampled each, but they all tasted like chicken to him. The other men discussed game shows and card games. It wasn't one of the best meals he'd ever had, but it hadn't been strictly bad. The bunk the Doctor was assigned to was far across the hall from Weyrd and his two friends, Feinrich and Gilly. When it was time for lockdown, Gilly walked him over to his bunk.

"There's no getting out of here 'til morning now. There's an emergency latrine through that door if you need it." He indicated the wall under the TV screen. "It's small, with no ventilation, so I recommend you hold it 'til morning and go across the hall when lockdown is over. Any questions?"

"Er, yes. One. If this isn't a prison, why can't we leave?"

" If you ask a guard that, he'll likely say it's for your own safety, lad. If you ask me, I'll tell you it's a prison."

"Weyrd said it wasn't a prison at all."

"Well lad, this is a prison; make no mistake. We're all slaves here. Only some of us refuse to believe it. But if that's what gets you through the day... Weyrd and I don't talk about it anymore. Come to me at the end of tomorrow and tell me if you're in prison or not."

"I see. How do I get out of here?"

"It's not hard during the day. But why bother? You'll just be rounded

up and brought back."

Day Three

When 6:30 rolled around, Weyrd approached the Doctor's bed. He reached his hand out to shake the Doctor awake, and just before he made contact with the Doctor's shoulder, the Doctor's eyes snapped open and he sat up straight.

"Ahrg!" Weyrd jumped back. "What the hell was that, lad?" The Doctor looked at Weyrd, whose hands were gathered up in front of his chest, his massive shoulders sunken.

"I wasn't asleep. I was merely thinking."

"Well, you scared the hell out of me, lad. Get up on your own next time will you?"

"Certainly." The Doctor stood up and winced. His head was still a tiny bit sore. He pulled the gauze band off of his head and inspected it. It wasn't wet at all, so there was no more bleeding. He tossed it on his bed. "Well then. Breakfast?" The Doctor was a bit anxious after his conversation with Gilly. He suspected the TARDIS of more than a simple malfunction. There was something amiss on this planet, and the Doctor was determined to find out what it was.

"Soon lad."

'Tell me. How large is this place?"

"It's pretty big"

"Hm. Where exactly is the exit, then?"

"So you're thinking about that already are you?"

"I'm curious."

"Well, there's no exit you can get to. So forget about it "

"Done. Forgotten." The Doctor looked around the room. Feinrich was sitting at a table by himself, groggy eyed. Gilly wasn't in sight. He knew

he'd need to get Gilly alone to find the information he needed. Clearly Weyrd was chosen as a mentor for the new 'slaves' for a good reason.

At that moment, the TV screen flashed on and the inmates that were already awake collectively turned their heads to watch. It looked like a newscast. The announcer was a woman with a round and ruddy face. Her hair hung in tight ringlets around her cheeks, and she had what looked like a tattoo of a ringed planet on her forehead.

"Good morning, citizens." She paused for a second, flashing a toothy and over-exuberant smile at the camera. "First an update on the campaign for Renordan liberation. Our troops have captured a strategically important air base nestled in the Mondor hills. General Fortran is pleased with the success of this mission, saying, 'This is a definite turning point for us. An end to this long and bitter conflict is now in sight.' Casualties are reported as heavier than usual, because the ONSF showered our troops with NTCs, which have been banned worldwide. This action has been thoroughly documented by the Plenarian High Court so that punitive measures can be taken once the conflict is officially resolved."

As the newscast continued, the Doctor turned to Weyrd. "What is the ONSF?"

"Eh?" Weyrd glanced at the Doctor, his upper lip curled in a grimace.

"ONSF. What does that mean? And what are NTCs?"

"I think the doctors in the infirmary underestimated the affects of that bump on your head." Weyrd shook his head and looked back at the screen.

The Doctor tugged on Weyrd's sleeve. "Humor me." Without looking at the Doctor, he muttered, "Orthodox Norridar Special Forces." The newscaster had moved on to a report about a local man who'd discovered a strange reptile in his toilet.

"And the NTCs?"

"Neurotoxic compounds. A class of chemical warfare compounds banned over eighty years ago. Basically, they melt your brain."

"How lovely."

Weyrd sat on the foot of the Doctor's bypk, his eyes downcast. He shook his head slowly. "I'm glad you know."

" Glad about what?" The Doctor leaned forward.

"About the victory. It's great. We all want an end to the Liberation. But when I hear about the stuff they're doing over there... NTCs and the like. Well, it gets to me a bit. That's all." The Doctor put his hand on Weyrd's arm. "It does sound terrible"

Weyrd jerked his arm away. "Well you're lucky. If it's really almost over, it won't be one of your sons or daughters over there getting their brains melted. My children are over there dying, and I never even met them."

"I beg your pardon?"

"Forget it. I shouldn't be talking like this. Forget it" Weyrd got up and turned to the Doctor. "We'll be going to exercise soon, so get ready." He turned and stalked toward the door. The Doctor sat puzzled, scanning the room for Gilly. He saw him sitting up on a bunk across the hall. He got up to go and speak to him, but a siren went off and all of the inmates began to press toward the door. Some were animated, discussing the reptilian toilet denizen from the newscast. Others moved in a bleary eyed stupor. The Doctor rose from his bunk and joined the crowd, listening to patches of conversation.

"I hope I get Glinna again today."

"NTCs... What a bunch of maniacs."

"Once I dropped a hot dog in my toilet. The next day it was gone... What do you make of that?"

"I think I'm getting a rash on my—"

"Man, I really have to piss."

Bits of conversation floated by the Doctor as he made his way into his first full day as a resident of Plenarian Breeding Facility Number 18.

* * *

Exercise was done individually, on a contraption that simulated a swimming-type action. It had a bench made of a gel that conformed to, and supported, the torso and waist of the user. There were handles for the hands and feet that provided resistance. It was horrible. Most of the inmates were quite proficient. The Doctor was heard uttering curses, although no one knew who TARDIS was, or why it was her fault the Doctor had to exercise.

At breakfast, which was a slab of something that looked like a brick but tasted quite like a mouthful of toast and beans, the Doctor sat next to Weyrd and Gilly.

"So, how long has the Liberation been going on?"

Gilly glanced at the Doctor. "What planet are you from?"

"Gallifrey. Why?"

"Bloody hell ." Weyrd shook his head. "Why do I get all the nut jobs?"

Gilly laughed. "Give the guy a break. The Liberation has been going on as long as I've been alive. And for forty years before I was born, too."

"And who are we liberating?"

"Well, it's the Renordans. They live in Torine under the oppressive mie of the Norridas. They've been persecuted for ages. Slavery, forced prostitution. That sort of thing."

"So your army is attempting to rescue them?"

"Well. Rescue? No. Not really. No."

Weyrd clipped Gilly on the arm. "We are so, you daft prick."

"No. We're actually hoping to install a republican government in Torine. So, we're not really rescuing them. We're just trying to give them a different form of government."

"Which would effectively free them, Gilly." Weyrd shook his head. "Don't listen to him, Doctor. He's got everything backward."

Gilly just chuckled. "Believe what you want Weyrd. I don't care anymore. The whole lot of you are nut jobs if you ask me."

Just then, a siren went off and strobes on the walls began flashing.

Everyone stood up and started for the exit.

"Fire drill," Weyrd shouted over the siren. "Just keep with everyone."

The Doctor allowed himself to be pushed along with the crowd. They snaked through a few corridors, and the Doctor marked which way then went. Finally they reached two heavy, metallic doors, which the guards pushed outward. They were quite thick and the Doctor was pretty sure that in the event of a serious fire most of the people here would die.

After passing through the first steel door, they began climbing stairs on a steep incline. They encountered three more of the large doors on the stairs, until suddenly they emerged into sunlight. They were herded up a small hill, armed guards on all sides. About a hundred yards to the west, the Doctor saw a steady stream of women emerging from a similar bunker. Looking back from where they'd come, the Doctor saw only one of the metal doors set into the ground. The entire facility appeared to be underground.

There was a fence surrounding the area, with guard towers on each comer. The guards outside seemed to be armed with some type of rifle rather than little metal poles. Their uniforms were dark green and they wore black helmets. At a guess, the installation seemed to house about one hundred men and women. The Doctor surveyed the area and headed for some high ground near the northern fence. He could tell they were on the top of a large hill, and he heard a drone coming from the valley. He'd been separated from Gilly, so he turned to the man next to him, a thin wispy fellow, older than most of the others. "What's down there?"

The man cast a sideways glance at the Doctor. "Where'd they fly you in from?"

"They hit me on the head when I arrived. Rather hard, you see. I've got a spell of amnesia."

"They hit you on the head, did they?"

"Yes. Quite a lot of blood, I assure you."

The older man cracked a grin. "They hit me on the head once. But I bit the bastard right in his sensitive parts. Tore his pants, I did." He stood

there, smiling wistfully.

"How excellent." The Doctor gazed off into the trees. "The valley then. What's down there?"

"That's the city, lad. Not more than a mile away. Can't you smell the smog?" The old man inhaled deeply. "I love that smell. It reminds me of walking to Roodie's for lunch during break. He had the best hot pastrami on the planet, I tell you." The old man's smile faded. "That was a long time ago.

A long time." A bell sounded, and the group began moving back inside. The old man stood on the hill, gazing into the trees. "I dream of the city sometimes," he whispered. "It smells like exhaust and anti-bacterials. I'd love to go back just once. Escape the smell of this place. The smell of sex." The Doctor whipped his head around to look at the man. "What was that?"

Just then a guard approached them from behind. "Move along now. Work Block A is starting soon. Can't be late."

The old man started toward the giant steel mouth in the ground. The Doctor followed him down the hill, listening to the man talk to himself. "Nope. Can't be late. Got work to do. Got to keep the Liberation going. I'll do my part. Yessir! I'm a proud father of the Liberation."

The guard chuckled. "Can it, Turrin. We know you're the father of the Liberation. Just get moving."

The Doctor trudged inside, following the stairs back underground. He glanced back at the steel doors as they were slammed shut behind him, hoping there was a way out other than those doors.

* * *

Despite the fire drill, Work Block A began on time. The Doctor was ushered into a small room, much more like a prison cell than the hall the men slept in. It was about ten square feet and the walls were solid concrete. A small bed with a flimsy mattress was up against one wall. A

strange harness hung from the ceiling. It looked like someone could be cuffed with it and suspended from the ceiling. Otherwise, the room was empty. There was an odd scent to the room. One the Doctor couldn't quite place. The Doctor sat on the bed and waited. After about thirty seconds, the guard opened the door again, and a woman came in. The door closed, and the'Doctor heard it lock. The woman moved to the center of the room and, without a word, undid her pants and slipped them off. The Doctor sat in shock with his mouth open as she folded them and set them on the floor. When she began to remover her panties he stood up and turned his back to her.

"Uh... Miss. If you wouldn't mind. Perhaps you should put your clothes back on."

"What?"

"I was just saying that you can put your pants back on.

"What are you? Some new guy?"

"Well, yes." The Doctor turned his head slightly to see if she'd dressed herself yet. She just stood there with her arms crossed, pants still folded on the ground, panties in a bunch on top of them.

"Ahh!" The Doctor whipped his head back around.

"Look," she started, and then paused. He heard her sigh.

"I know it's hard the first time. But I'm in no mood for this, so if we could just get it over with, I'd be grateful."

"Get what over with?"

"I think you know. Don't toy with me."

The Doctor just stood there, knowing suddenly what they were supposed to be doing. He began tapping his foot and wringing his hands.

"Listen. I'm almost certain I'm ovulating, and the sooner I can get pregnant, the sooner I can get out of the rotation again. So help me out, will you?"

"I can't," the Doctor blurted out.

"Oh God." She started toward the door. "Another damn impotent."

“No, it’s not that I can’t. Not like that. I just can’t. I mean, we just met. And now we’re to...” The nature of the Doctor’s prison began sinking in. “We’re to breed.”

“Yes,” the woman whispered. They stood in silence, the half-naked woman staring at the Doctor’s back.

“You’d like to get pregnant again, then?”

“Yes. I would. And we’re running out of time. If we can finish fast enough, I can ask the guard for a second man. If I can couple six times each day for the next few days, I’ll be out of the rotation within a week.”

The Doctor shook his head. “I can’t. I’m sorry.” He heard the woman dressing behind him.

She walked past him and banged on the door. “I’m ready for another man,” she hollered. Her voice cracked, and the Doctor was quite sure she was on the verge of tears. The door opened, and as she left she shot a watery glance at the Doctor. He sat on the bunk and hung his head. “I have to get out of here,” he whispered. “I have to get out today.”

The door opened again suddenly, and another woman was pushed inside. “Not again,” the Doctor murmured.

This woman crumpled to ground when the door closed and dragged herself to the comer of the room. Tears stained her face, and she was trembling. She looked a bit too thin, and her long hair was unkempt.

“Are you all right?” The Doctor started toward her, but she cringed, so he stopped in the center of the room and sat cross-legged on the floor. The woman sat in silence, staring at the wall. She didn’t sob. She just breathed in and out while tears trickled from the comers of her eyes. “I won’t hurt you. I promise. I’m just going to sit here until they take us out of here. Okay?”

The woman nodded and glanced up at the Doctor. “Are you new here?” She spoke in monotone.

“Yes, I am.” He paused. “What’s your name?”

“Shrina.”

“Hello Shrina. I’m the Doctor. It’s a pleasure to meet you.” He smiled

at her. She just stared at him as if he had four heads. “Well Shrina, I’m normally quite likable, but under the circumstances, I suppose I can understand your reluctance to talk. Normally, when I meet people, they feel like they’ve known me forever and they just talk and talk and talk. And well, quite honestly, I find it hard sometimes to get them, people I mean, to be quiet.” The Doctor cocked his head sideways, noting the distinct lack of effect his speech had had on her. “It seems my universal charm is failing me when I need it most. I’m just going to sit on that bed there, Shrina, and if you’d like to talk, feel free. Otherwise, we’ll just wait this ordeal out in silence.”

And in silence they sat. Shrina kept glancing from the wall to the harness hanging from the ceiling. She wiped her face with her sleeve. The Doctor wished he had a hanky to offer. He sat back on the bed, leaning against the wall. Finally she got up and went to the harness. She pulled it down, and it went all the way to the ground. She sat down with it in her lap and began cuffing her feet. The Doctor was trying not to stare, but he was failing miserably.

“The thought of having his baby is awful.” She said it quietly, staring at the wall in front of her. “But I have to try, I suppose. It’s the only way out of here.” Once both her feet were strapped in, she tugged on the suspending cord and her feet flew upwards so that she was suspended in the air by her feet, with her upper back and head still on the ground.

“What are you doing?”

“We’re supposed to do this after copulation. It helps the sperm out. You know. Putting gravity on their side and all.” She rolled her head toward the Doctor, her mouth flat, her eyes half-lidded.

“I see.” The Doctor blinked. His extremities were beginning to feel cold, and he was quite sure it had nothing to do with the building’s climate control system.

“Somehow I end up with Feinrich more often than not.

He’s horrible. He likes being here. He says awful things to me. And he does it so hard, and it always hurts.”

The Doctor wanted to shout, “How can they let him treat you like that?” But he didn’t. It was rather foolish after all, not unlike a zebra asking a lioness to make it quick and painless.

The Doctor made up his mind. “Shrina, I’m going to get you out of here. I met a man who said it isn’t terribly difficult to escape, and from what I can tell, the city is close by.”

“No. I won’t go. Not after last time.” She paused, regarding the Doctor. “You can try for yourself if you want. It’s not hard to escape. You just have to sneak to the basement during ree time and climb up the ventilation shaft.” Her voice didn’t change. Her hands were crossed on her chest and she just stared up at the ceiling.

“So you’ve done it before?”

“Yes. Once. It was silly. It was a few of us. Me and my friends Drochil and Sorrin. We’d all been residents of ithe city’s Psychic Health Center. But after the election, the new commander felt that the state shouldn’t be paying for that sort of thing and the facility was closed down. We ended up on the street, but not for long. We were picked up that very night, just like the homeless have been for decades.”

“Picked up and brought here?”

“Yes.” She glanced at the Doctor. “Where are you from?”

“ I’ve got amnesia.”

“Ah. So you don’t remember how this all works.”

“No.”

“Well, it’s simple. This place is a homeless shelter. It’s also a place where political upstarts can receive therapy and realize the error of their ways. But that isn’t commonly known on the outside.”

“You mean people think you’re getting shelter but you are really being forced to breed?”

“Hmm? Oh, no. They know. It’s how we pay for our shelter and food. By providing babies for the Liberation.” The Doctor stood up quickly, his hands flailing. “What?”

“ They know. So anyway, we escaped. We went into the city and tried

to hide. But they found us after a few nights and brought us back. They were angry. They raped us. All six of them, taking turns with each of us. Drochil got pregnant and went out of rotation. She died in childbirth. Sonin is pregnant now. It's her second. She's had some problems conceiving. I'm going for my fourth."

"Where are the babies? What happens to them?"

"Well, the babies from this facility go about a hundred miles south to the Tri-Coastal Training Facility. By the age of sixteen, they're ready to participate in the Liberation."

Just then the door swung open and the guard came in. "All right. Time's up. Let me help you down there." He went to the harness and unbuckled Shrina's feet. He set her gently down. "Okay you two, report to your libraries." The Doctor had no idea where the library was, but he knew where the basement was.

* * *

Shrina had been right. It wasn't hard to escape at all. There had been a few close calls but, having had much practice sneaking around, the Doctor was able to avoid scrutiny. Finding the ventilation shaft had proved more difficult. It was in the very last place he decided he would look — behind the TARDIS. The climb up the shaft was decidedly more difficult, primarily because it wasn't meant to be climbed. It was an almost vertical accent of at least four stories, with no hand holds of any kind. He had to cram his body in so that his back was against one side of the shaft and his feet pressed the opposite side. He scooted upwards little by little, resting quite often. The only pleasant thing about the escape was the breeze that filled the shaft. "It could be worse," he murmured at one point. "I could be escaping through the sewage system."

At the top was a metal grate, which seemed to lock from the outside. From inside, it was easy to turn the latch and push the grate open. He emerged sweaty and exhausted two hours after entering the ventilation

shaft. He didn't know quite where he was. The fence and guard towers were not in sight. There was a fenced area to his right containing electrical boxes and wire towers. The wires went from the tower straight into the ground. He decided to follow the wires, hoping they'd take him to the city. It was raining. "I wish I still had an umbrella," he said as he started off.

* * *

The Doctor descended the hill by the facility for about half an hour and found himself going up a second hill for another twenty minutes. He knew he wasn't taking the most direct route because he could hear the drone of the city almost the whole way, but he had no desire to become lost in the woods, so he stuck to following the wires. When he reached the summit of the last hill, he was there, and if it hadn't been for the topography of the area, he would have seen it much sooner. It was all skyscrapers. Rather tall ones at that. And it was oddly contained. There was a distinct absence of urban sprawl. The city was an oasis of evolved life and technology, right in the middle of the forest.

He trudged down the hill toward a road that seemed to loop around the city. There was a steady flow of traffic, all motorcycles, some with sidecars. The Doctor continued down the hill, quite happy to be in his prison clothes. His shoes certainly would have been ruined in all the mud, and his shirt and pants were soaked through. As he approached the highway and hefted himself over a concrete barrier, he found himself fantasizing about being dried out in the hottest of hot deserts.

The Doctor waited for a few minutes for a break in traffic, but none came. Frustrated, he began waving his hands in the air and hollering. "Got to get through here! Need to cross, please!" He took a few tentative steps into the road, motorcycles being significantly less intimidating than cars. The bikes simply swerved around him. He took the highway one lane at a time, pausing at the edge of each to wave his hands madly, thus

alerting the oncoming traffic that he was about to walk out in front of it.

When he made it to the concrete wall on the opposite side he climbed over it and sat for a moment to rest. “Phew!” He wiped his brow with a soggy hand. “That was new”

There were skyscrapers directly in front of him; he couldn’t see a single short building. The city just began right in front of him. He wondered if it ended so abruptly on the other side. There was a road that ended at the concrete barrier, so the Doctor stood up and stretched before starting down the road to see where it began.

The city had been relatively quiet near the highway, but as the Doctor traveled further into the city, the pedestrian and motorcycle traffic picked up quite a bit. Most people were dressed in more formal clothes than the Doctor was wearing. Many were wearing pants or skirts, with button-up shirts and jackets. The Doctor noted that both men and women wore skirts. “Hmm. Well, no-hang ups about that I guess.” He saw very few people in jeans, and no one had a denim top. He got a few strange looks, but most people just ignored him.

He finally stopped at a newsstand. The woman tending the booth looked up at him. “Don’t bother browsing if you don’t have an account.” Her voice was flat.

“No. I don’t have an account. I was just wondering — if I had a news item that needed to be reported, who would I tell?”

“Which paper do you want to go to?” She perked up a bit, even cracking a bit of a smile.

“Um, which one do you think is best?”

“Well, I like to read the *Monitor*. But a lot of other folks like the *Eye* .”

“How many papers are there?”

“Six.”

“In one city?”

“Well, some of them are smaller. Which one would you like to go to?” She seemed genuinely pleased to speak to him. Perhaps she didn’t have many friends.

"Can you tell where to find all of them?"

She chuckled softly and shook her head. "They're all on the same street. Go up four blocks and turn right. Then go four more blocks and go left. One more block and you're on GlobeWatch Boulevard. That's what you want."

"Excellent. Thank you very much."

"Good luck with your news item."

The Doctor nodded to her and went off down the street. The first building he reached had the planet logo on it, the one the newscaster in the prison had tattooed on her forehead. He went in there first. There were directories on the wall, but he couldn't read any of them. There was a man sitting at a large black crescent-shaped desk reading a book.

The Doctor approached. "Sir, could you tell me where to go if I have a news item I'd like to report?"

The man didn't look up from his book. "*Monitor* or *Eye*?"

"Both, actually."

"The *Monitor* is on the thirty-first floor and the *Eye* is on the fiftieth."

The elevator ride was quite fast, and soon he found himself in a hardwood chair waiting for a moment of the news editor's time. The wall on the Doctor's right held eight doors. In front of him was what looked like an entire floor of desks, with reporters bustling about and chattering on the phone. The Doctor considered approaching a reporter with his story, but just as he rose to do so, the editor's door swung open and a smallish, balding man with no chin motioned the Doctor in.

The office was fairly small, dominated by a heavy block of a desk, which seemed to be tinted blue. On the wall behind the desk, the planet logo was painted on the wall.

"I'm Hirmo Wandlnka-Shearmot. I hear you have a bit of news for me." He motioned for the Doctor to sit in one of the plush chairs in front of his desk.

The Doctor sat and sank deep into the cushions. It was a deceptive chair. It didn't look like it had the ability to swallow the Doctor whole,

but nevertheless, once the chair had finished settling, the Doctor's hips were much lower than his knees, and he was far from comfortable. He began, "Well, sir. I have come to report on the atrocities that regularly occur in this city's breeding facility." The Doctor paused. The editor picked a piece of lint off of his sleeve and flicked it across the room.

"What type of atrocities?" The editor sounded as if he would find a slug race more interesting.

"Well, the facility is a kind of atrocity in and of itself, don't you think?"

"No"

"Hmm. Well. Yes. Well." The Doctor thought of Shrina. "Some of the inmates abuse the others "

"How so?" The editor yawned.

"Sometimes, when they are forced to ... breed, some of the men are violent with the women. They hurt them."

"That's not allowed."

"Well, it shouldn't be. But I'm afraid it is being allowed to happen."

"The guards know about this?"

"Well, I don't see how they couldn't. When a woman comes out of a room crying after a sexual encounter. I'd consider it safe to assume she had a bad time."

"Maybe she's in love with the man, and she's sad to be separated from him." The editor leaned back in his chair and rested his hands on his chest.

"Well, that isn't it at all. He hurt her. And he said things to her."

"Such as?"

"Well, I don't strictly know. But I know he was very mean." The Doctor felt a ball of something nasty forming in his chest.

"It doesn't sound like you have much of a story at all."

"The guards raped her. She tried to escape, and when they caught her and her friends, they raped her."

The editor regarded the Doctor. He squinted his small eyes and shook

his head. “I’d hardly call that an atrocity. I’d call that punishment.”

“What?” The Doctor attempted to dramatically shoot out of his chair in protest, but the chair was so deep the best he could manage was a feeble hop, which resulted in a lurch forward.

“Look here, lad. I know you escaped. I can tell by your clothes. You’ve got an interest in making the facility look bad. What you don’t understand is that the public doesn’t want to hear about the facility. It’s the best thing that has ever happened to this country, and no one wants to see it threatened.”

“You’re the press. You’re supposed to expose the truth. It shouldn’t matter what the public wants to hear about.”

The editor stared at the Doctor, shaking his head. “You’ve misjudged my purpose. It is my job to keep this paper circulating. Got it? If I start accusing our most noble institution of atrocities, it’s liable to upset some people.”

“Noble? Noble?” The Doctor rushed around the editor’s desk and leaned over him, hollering, “What is noble about wholesale rape? I’ll tell you what’s noble about it. Nothing. Not one single thing. And no one can convince me otherwise.”

The editor put his hands on the Doctor’s shoulders and shoved him backwards. He punched a button on the desk and said, “Frennal, call security.”

The Doctor glared at the editor and turned to go.

“Lad, there hasn’t been a single homeless person in this country in seventy-five years. And unlike the welfare of centuries past, our people get a sense that they contribute to society in return for their food and shelter. We take care of those who can’t take care of themselves. How dare you try and jeopardize that?”

“When people can’t take care of themselves, you care for them. And you don’t ask for anything in return.” The Doctor stomped out of the office and slammed the door behind him.

He hurried out of the newsroom and into the lobby. He smiled at the

receptionist and pressed the elevator button just as four security officers burst out of the stairwell. Security was far too pleasant a word to describe these people. They were dressed from head to toe in black, sporting black boots and black helmets with mirrored visors. And the weapons they carried were definitely not little metal poles.

The Doctor had no desire to find out what they really were. He ran up to the closest guard and grabbed him by the shoulders. "Hurry man! He's gone mad in there. Hurry, before it's too late." Watching his reflection in the guard's visor, the Doctor wasn't sure they'd buy his act. His clothes were still soggy and his hair hung in a limp and tangled mess. But true to form, they obeyed their imperative to take orders and hurried into the newsroom.

The elevator slid open and the receptionist said, "What's going on in there?"

"He can't live with himself anymore," the Doctor answered as the door shut. As the elevator whirred to the fiftieth floor, the Doctor considered talking to a reporter. When the elevator opened, he stepped out and did a double take. The receptionist's desk was once again crescent shaped, and sported the ringed planet logo.

The Doctor approached the desk. "Hello there. Is this the office of the *Eye*?"

A young woman answered him. "Yes, sir. Do you have an appointment?"

"No, I have a news item I'd like to give to a reporter."

"All stories must be assigned by the news editor, sir. Would you like to wait for her?"

"Yes."

"Go through that door and have a seat. I'll let her know you're here."

"Thank you." He went through a pair of double doors. The layout of the room was exactly the same as at the *Monitor*. He went to a reporter's desk. She was typing something. "Excuse me."

She didn't stop typing. "What?"

"Is this paper affiliated with the *Monitor*?" She stopped typing and whipped her head around. "No! What an insult. They're far too conservative over there."

" Well, I noticed that you have the same logo."

"Oh, that's the Globe Watch logo. They own all print and TV media in the country. But we're not affiliated with one another." She cast a sideways glance at him, curling her lip. "Geez mister, what planet are you from?"

"Gallifrey." The Doctor peered at her monitor. "What are you writing about?"

"The ONSF used NTC's. I'm writing about that. Did you at least know about that?"

"Yes, I heard this morning. I have some news if you're interested."

"All stories have to be authorized by the editor. You'll have to talk to her."

"But this is rather sensitive, and it might be better if I just talked to you."

"Look, I'm trying to work here." She glared at the Doctor, and he returned to his chair somewhat wilted.

The Doctor waited. And waited. And waited some more. Finally, after an hour or so, the editor opened her door. A man wearing a plaid skirt and a white collared shirt left the office, and the editor looked at the Doctor. "I'm about ready to get out of here. Come in. You've got two minutes."

The Doctor hopped up and trotted into the office. His hopes were high. He thought that a woman might have a more realistic perspective. The woman was already packing papers into a briefcase.

"I've come to report poor conditions in the breeding facilities."

"Like what?" She was reading one of the papers.

"Rape."

"That happens sometimes, yes." She closed her case and looked up at the Doctor. "What else?"

The Doctor's hearts sank. "Isn't that enough?"

"Enough for what?"

"For you to report."

"That would be like writing 'Scientists report the sun will come up in the morning.' Men and women get raped there occasionally. It happens in the city as well. We punish the offenders and move on."

"Ah! Right! But in the facility, the rapes aren't being punished."

"Are they being reported?"

"Well, I don't quite know. But in some cases it's obvious. Or in one case I know of, the guards raped the inmate."

" Please don't refer to them as inmates. They are residents."

" What? I just told you that guards are raping the inmates and you're bickering over semantics?"

"Look. It's obvious to me that you have some personal problems here. The simple fact of the matter is that people don't want to hear about the breeding facilities. The cities are cleaner than ever, and there are no beggars on the street bothering the contributing citizens of society. I don't know how you ended up in the facility, but perhaps you should take a moment and think about how lucky you are to have a place to sleep and food to eat."

The something that had been building in the Doctor bubbled up and popped. "I will not think about how lucky I am! I will not. You should be disgusted with yourself. You keep people locked up as slaves, forcing them to copulate and then stealing their babies. You couldn't tolerate such an existence. You are right; they should be taken care of. But not like this. This is barbaric."

"Look, people know what life they will be getting into if they become vagrants. If they didn't want to end up in the facilities, they would work harder to keep their jobs."

"The woman I met there was thrown out of a hospital with nowhere to go. What choice did she make?"

The editor looked as if she had another bit of fascist propaganda to

throw in the Doctor's face, but she hesitated for a moment. "I challenge you. Find me one person who is moved by your story. Find me one person who cares." She paused, her hands resting on her briefcase. "Find me one person and bring him or her to me. Find me one person, and I'll let you write the story yourself."

"Excellent!" He hurried around the desk and grabbed her hand, pumping it up and down. "You won't regret it. You're doing the right thing."

She stared at him. "Get out before I change my mind."

Day Four

The Doctor saw colors. Blurs and bits of memory. The moment on the street when he wished for the power to shoot lightening out of his finger tips at the selfish and jaded citizens, his voice raised, spit flying off his tongue. He remembered hands clamping around his hands and feet. And pain and black. Scenes came in flashes. Broken sentences tickled him in agony. "We need them..."

"They deserve whatever they get..."

"It's better than being homeless..."

It's better for who? He'd screamed it. *For who? For them or you?* And something had hit him. Something large and green and bright with light. And it knocked him over, knocked him out. It came from a gun. It burned. He burned.

He lay and he burned still. And he saw colors.

Day Five

The Doctor's eyes fluttered open into gloom. He sat up in the men's residence hall. Back in the facility. The Doctor's eyes burned. He leaned forward, burying his face in his hands. Wetness fell from his eyes onto his palms. He sat like that, hunched over in his bunk, weeping, until the morning alarm sounded. He shuffled out of the room with everyone else but slipped out of line and headed for the basement.

The TARDIS was where he'd left it. He stood and stared at it for a moment. "Why? Why here?" He collapsed, still weak from the stun blast. "There was nothing..." He began to shake. "Nothing." He sat on the floor, on his knees, as visions of a battered Sbrina danced across his eyes. He saw Feinrich's brutish face, his twisted mouth shouting at her. And he remembered the city. "They didn't care. There was nothing I could do. They didn't care." The door to the TARDIS swung open. The Doctor lurched to his feet and staggered inside. The door closed behind him, and in a moment, there was sound and light, and the Doctor was gone.

KEY TO THE FUTURE

BY MARK PHIPPEN

Amazing grace, how sweet the sound
That saved a wretch like me.
I once was lost, but now am found,
Was blind, but now I see.

The man in chains was on his knees now, coughing as the dust billowed up from the fall. His jacket had been removed; it lay on the floor, dirtied and tom. His shirt was ripped open across his chest. He lifted his head, trying to look his captor in the eye, but his bruised and bloody face was creased in pain, and he could see nothing through the tears in his eyes.

He didn't need to. Memories were enough. Places and faces flashed through his mind: Chatham and his beloved Mary, St. Christopher, talking through the night with Clunie, setting sail as captain of the *African*, meeting the man who would be his captor for the first time.

He was a small man, his captor. White, definitely a Westerner. British? Probably a Scot. An unimpressive man to behold. Deceptive.

One of the other men circling the captive moved forward, a vague blur of movement. The captive braced himself, ready for another kicking. But it never came. The British man was holding the other man back. "No," the white man was saying, "you're not to hurt him."

Relief washed over the captive momentarily, but was quickly replaced by a deepening fear. They wanted him alive. They were saving him for something. The captive's mind raced. This was Vodou country.

But the violent man, a Dagomban, was arguing. "He deserves it! He is scum!" The man's English was good, but it still carried the strong tones of his mother country. This country.

"No more violence, or I set him free right now." The white man's tone was hard, and he was jangling the keys he held to emphasize his point.

The captive's heart leapt. *Kick me!* his mind screamed. *Kick me! Punch me! Cut me!*

But the Dagomban was backing off with a grunt, reluctantly accepting the white man's words. Another Dagomban spoke. "The white man is right, it would make us no better than him." The new blur with a voice kicked the dust in front of the captive, making him choke. "We will show him mercy, show him how a really civilized people behave. We are not all like the Ashanti!"

The white man was nodding, resting his hand on the second Dagomban's shoulder. "Here's your chance," he said, handing him the keys. "You're free, and you hold the key to the future. Make sure the world turns your way, just as the key turns the way you choose."

The Dagomban paused, looking at the key in his hand.

Despite his words of peace, there was evidently some doubt in his mind. To set free such evil? Could he do it?

The answer came as he bent down and placed the key in the padlock holding the captive's chains. Another pause. Then a click as the key turned, and the padlock came apart. A clink as the chains fell to the ground around the captive.

The white man was bending down, leaning on that umbrella he always carried, bringing his face level with the bruised face of the captive. "I told you I would stop you, Newton. It's over. Now go. I cannot guarantee that this moment of grace and mercy will last."

And with that, the Doctor turned and walked out of the village, his

umbrella over his shoulder.

Seasons of Fear

By Paul Cornell

Based on the Big Finish production Seasons of Fear *Original script by Paul Cornell & Caroline Symcox Novelized by Paul Cornell With thanks to Big Finish*

The Doctor put a finger to his lips, playing absent-mindedly with them as he stared at the TARDIS console. Slowly, his features broke into a smile. “Yes, I think that’s it.”

“ What is?” A petite, pretty girl in a party dress wandered into the control room. This was Charley Pollard, the Doctor’s latest companion in his travels through time and space. “We’re not having problems getting there, are we?”

“What? Oh, no no no no no! Well, actually, yes.”

“But I found the right sort of dress and everything!”

“ And your friend Alex will get to see it in all its glory. I promise. The old girl’s having one of her funny turns. It took six tries for us to get here, but...” The central column slowly, and rather grudgingly, subsided to a halt and the Doctor checked the systems again. “Yeah. Here we are.”

“How wonderful. Alex is such a chum.” Charley’s excitement suddenly turned into a frown. “But, Doctor, won’t he expect me to be dead?”

“What?” The Doctor carefully kept his eyes on the console. “Just because I saved you from the fiery death that claimed your fellow passengers? No, because last night I stopped the TARDIS in 1930 and sent messages ahead to him.”

“ Goodness.”

“Had nothing to do with it.” He was afraid, suddenly, that she might have heard the worry in his voice. So he spun on his heel and grinned at her. ‘Tell me about Alex.”

“He dances divinely, and he always has something stunning in his buttonhole.”

"He sounds like a man after my own heart. I'll not meet him though."

"What? Why?"

"Because I'm not a gooseberry."

Charley merely raised an eyebrow. "Well, obviously."

The Doctor went to the coat hook on the back of the door and retrieved his tailcoat. As an afterthought he grabbed a broad-brimmed colonial hat. "I quite like the idea of entering 1931 the old-fashioned way! And there's a spot in the tea gardens at the Singapore Hilton where the humidity isn't so oppressive, and you can hear everything across the harbor. A perfect place to witness the New Year celebrations." He dropped the hat on his head and hit the door control. "And now it's just out there! Come on, off we go! No, wait!" He suddenly grabbed Charley by the shoulder and held her back. "What?!" she cried.

"This hat... Is it me?"

"Oh, Doctor!" Charley grabbed the hat and cuffed him with it. "It really suits you!"

* * *

So that was how the Doctor came to be sitting, at the stroke of midnight, in a lounge chair in the gardens of the Singapore Hilton, watching the junks in the harbor, lit up with lanterns and setting off fireworks. He had left the TARDIS in a side street near the hotel and had watched as Charley found Alex by the bar, as per his messages. Alex looked to be a jolly, square-jawed boy, overjoyed at seeing Charley again. Not quite believing it. He got up off his stool, hugged her and showed her his buttonhole. They had ordered their gin slings and headed for the terrace just as the sun was going down.

So that was one promise kept. The Doctor withdrew to find a waiter and his beloved comer of the gardens. They were oddly deserted tonight. He supposed everyone was down in the harbor proper, joining in the party.

He was wondering if he'd done the right thing. When he'd rescued Charley. When he'd decided that she really should finally meet the boy she'd originally stowed away on the R-101 to rendezvous with. The TARDIS didn't seem to think so. Or was the old girl just playing up because that was what she did from time to time?

And was Charley just being kind about the hat?

When she got back, he would ask, quietly, if she wanted to stay here. He'd broken so many laws of time to save her. She deserved a life in her proper place. A life of relative safety.

He had ordered newspapers from the waiter, and spent the next few hours examining them with a pot of tea at hand. He had been looking for stories of the airship crash. There was a little coverage. Distant events, no matter how tragic. He had only saved one, he thought, and yet he felt profoundly worried at having done even that.

But gradually the peace of the gardens had sagged into him, and he'd put the papers down and thought more of the tea and the entertainment in the harbor below, and had enjoyed the slow change of light from dusk to midnight.

But just past midnight, a shadow fell over him.

"You're back a bit early, Charley," the Doctor murmured, not looking up. "How's Alex?"

The voice that replied was deep and powerful, with a cultured edge to it, and an accent that had been shaped to purity by its owner having lived in many places. "Not very perceptive of you, Doctor. I am not your charming companion." The Doctor looked up. The man standing before him wore a white colonial suit, which contrasted with his dark, slicked back hair and moustache. His origins... Italian, perhaps? A proud brow. And those eyes! They pierced the darkness, fixed on the Doctor like a hawk staring down at its prey.

"Ah," he said carefully. "I should have known. Charley doesn't have a moustache. Have we met?"

"That's a complex question. My name is Sebastian Grayle. May I

join you?"

"Be my guest." As Grayle took a seat in the chair opposite, the Doctor saw a waiter heading into the hotel and called for two more pots of tea.

When he turned back to Grayle, the man was still staring at him, a sharky smile on his features. "It's a pleasure to see you here," he said.

"And you. Not that I know who you are. Nice moustache, though." A sudden horrible thought struck the Doctor. Why was this stranger smiling so much? He leaned closer and whispered to him, looking around in case they might be overheard. "How do you feel about this hat?"

Grayle threw back his head and laughed heartily. Which, thought the Doctor, was rather hurtful of him. "Such folly! Such arrogance!"

"Such a pleasure not to meet a yes-man!" The Doctor grabbed the hat from his own head and slapped it generously onto Grayle's. 'Here, it looks so much better on you.'

Grayle gently took the hat off, examined it for a moment, and then tossed it into the bushes. "For once your mockery does not infuriate me, Doctor. This time, I am the one in control."

The Doctor was by now certain that this was a man who would not allow himself to be mocked in any way. The most dangerous sort of man. At the most dangerous time. But he kept a kind, open smile on his face. He seemed to think that he was an idiot, at least. That was just the way the Doctor liked it. "I'm sure you are," he said. "But I'm still pretty certain we haven't met."

"Oh, but we have, Time Lord!"

"Are you confusing me with someone else?" The Doctor formed his face into a dark frown. "I'm not the one who says, 'You have to obey me.'" He blew out his cheeks. "I don't meddle. Not as such." And he raised his hands and then dropped them as all mime failed him. "And I'm not a glamorous woman at the moment."

"We are old acquaintances. In my past. But in your future." Now the Doctor couldn't help but frown. "You've broken the First Law of Time?"

Grayle chuckled again. “Not at all. I am immortal. Thanks to my masters. I have waited through the generations for this meeting. So I can finally look you in the eye.” He leaned closer, his burning eyes fixed on the Doctor’s. “So I can finally allow myself to feel the satisfaction of your death!”

“ My death,” the Doctor whispered. “What have you done?”

“ Only now do you begin to feel the bite of it. I have killed you. Doctor. Not only that, but I have delivered this world to my masters.” He gestured at the gardens and the harbor, and the lights of the hotel behind them. “Look around you. Look at those poor fools in the harbor, celebrating the turn of a year they don’t even acknowledge in their calendar! They are illusions, Doctor. This timeline no longer truly exists, and neither do they!”

The Doctor felt something give inside him. It was as if the floor had fallen away beneath him. He could feel, somehow, that Grayle was telling the truth. He inclined his head slightly, allowing the man to continue.

“My masters resurrected this place using their power over time, simply so I could indulge a whim, to see my old foe face to face at last. The reality of the planet Earth, behind this charade, is much changed. My masters are the masters of Earth! In the real universe, this planet is their feeding ground!”

“Your... masters?”

“That is how complete their mastery over time has become. Your own people, Doctor, in this new timeline, are no longer the Lords of existence. That honor has fallen to my employers!”

“Who are?”

“I think... I will let that remain as a surprise.”

The Doctor stood up, his body shaking. He had felt vulnerable at saving Charley from time. And now time was having its revenge on him! “ITI prevent this!” he cried.

“But it’s already happened!” Grayle leaned back, delighting in the

Doctor's discomfort. "You can't rely on the history you know, Doctor. Not any more. My task is done." He leapt to his feet, and took one last long look at the Time Lord. "And now I shall take my leave of you. Revenge is sweet, but I have drunk deeply enough. We shall not meet again." He started to chuckle, and wandered off, his laughter fading into the night.

The Doctor stood, aghast, wondering what his next move could possibly be.

After a moment, he realized that he didn't have one.

He sprinted off into the darkness after Gray le. "Wait!" he called. "Stop!"

He sped through the gardens, diving right and left past ornaments and shrubs, until he collided with- "Charley!" They both nearly fell, grabbed each other's hands and managed giddily to stay upright.

Charley giggled, not noticing the Doctor's distress. "Doctor, you have to meet Alex! He's in the-"

The Doctor interrupted her. "Did you just pass a man going out as you were coining in?"

But Charley wasn't listening, her head still full of dancing. "He's absolutely charming!"

"I don't think so!"

"You don't know him!"

"Well, no, but he said he'd killed me!"

"Alex Grayle said he'd killed you?"

"Not Alex!" The Doctor stopped and grabbed her by the shoulders. "Grayle? Alex is also called Grayle?"

"Also?" asked Charley, both eyebrows as high as they could go.

"As well as Sebastian!"

"And who's Sebastian?"

"Sebastian is the Grayle who says he's killed me!" Charley frowned. "Have you been fighting with Alex's granddad? They're on this tour-"

"Granddad?! My aunt Flavia he's his granddad! He's an immortal!"

Charley took his hands from her shoulders and held both of them. “I’m very confused.”

“So’s time. Charley, something awful has happened. Sometime in the past... the monsters have taken over!” Charley looked around her, as if she doubted the Doctor’s sanity. “Then how can everything be... like this?”

“Later, Charley, later!” He hauled her off in the direction of the TARDIS. “We have to get out of here, before they decide they don’t need this timeline anymore!” He turned for a moment, and stared desperately at her, trying to communicate how precarious their situation was. “Charley... we’ve got a world to save!”

GRANDMOTHER CLAUSE

BY PHIL PASCOE

> *"Shhh! Don't tell anyone, but that's where Faction Paradox are hiding after* The Ancestor Cell *— in the interstices between US billions and UK billions in late 20th Century spreadsheets. Some of them also hid in bank account rounding errors when the UK went decimal, and some of the more stupid ones accidentally got sent back 100 years when the Hidden Parliament failed to reach agreement in time on the Y2K bug."*
>
> — Peter Anghelides, May 2001

Just the bare bones.

Reality, reads the sign over the door. The 'i' vworps in and out of existence intermittently, alternating with the company logo — a stylized representation of the square root of minus one.

"Okay. So, just the basics left then," says Little Cousin (Twice Removed) Vicente. He runs down the list, handing over each item in turn.

"Deeds " Check.

"Key." Check.

"Animal blood. Free range? Free range." Check.

"That's it then." He puts down his clipboard and produces a smile for the proud new owners of a leap-frogged second in the Forty-Ninth Century. A lovely young couple, could've been poster Brother and Sister

of the family. Matching bone masks.

Bet those weren't even bat skulls, thinks Vicente after they leave. But he doesn't say anything.

Except, inevitably: "Next."

* * *

The waiting room is packed at the best of nows.

At this moment-equivalent external to normal space-time, following (relatively speaking) recent (speaking relatively) events (depending on who you believed) — look, let's just say this particular now has become a vast holding area. Everything left of the family, plus all the other members of time-oblique species put out lately.

"Right. Who wanted the glaring mistakes in tacky SF tachyonics, and who're the extras in cut scenes from *Groundhog DayV*

His job: Finding somewhen other than the Eleven Day Empire for them to live. Vicente feels his spirits sink. So many people needing calendrical or administrative oddities to fold themselves away in and lie the nth-dimensional equivalent of low.

And none of them are prepared to wait.

No, there is one. In the comer near the door, some guy clearly ignoring the no smoking sign. Head low, mouthing obscenities — something about a big switch — he only emerges from his reverie to pat down re-ignited patches on his smoldering trousers.

Having to deal with that one eventually doesn't exactly cheer Vicente up.

* * *

Home was a Christmas in the 1970s.

Vicente at least had got himself somewhen to take time out from work. That particular December morning, the authorities in a small Latin

American nation had done something terrible. So terrible, in fact, as to erase itself entirely from the country's collective memory. Future historians argued endlessly over what happened, trying to weigh up the claims of victims' families and alleged perpetrators, but in effect the moment was blank, subject to endless, irresolvable reinterpretation.

Prime real estate.

He'd woken up this morning, like every other Christmas morning, to find nothing in the stocking he hung at the end of the bed.

Which wasn't atypical, to be honest. Vicente's life wasn't great. He'd never made it in the Faction, not even as a proper Cousin with all the proficiency badges and everything. He'd ended up in a rubbish job largely by being the only one willing to touch it, and no one ever took him seriously.

Home was the only time he had for himself.

* * *

The Men Without Watches just stare at him.

They don't have time pieces, just a strip of white around — or, instead of — their wrists. Vicente kicks himself. "So, no, you probably wouldn't have an appointment.''

The squat one proffers a business card. In gold on black, it reads:

Hours, Seconds & Minutes
Temporal probate attorneys
"Our hands — your returns "

"We represent a client," gabbles the gaunt one, "who was set to inherit a region of obscure space-time consequent to a lodging of claim which we

can adequately and ably demonstrate was not and cannot become invalidated by even the most radical changes in the status quandocumque."

"However," the tall one with the tic interrupts, "your organization, and, as we ascertain, after due investigation, specifically, you, have, already, assigned this moment to someone else, undeserving."

Vicente feels nauseous. "A twenty-fifth of December during the 1970s? Yes, okay. And imagine your client's annoyance to find his holiday home occupied by time squatters." Honestly, could things get any—

"We're invoking the Grandfather clause," says Hours.

* * *

In legal jargon, a 'grandfather clause' just means that the most prior claim on something gets upheld.

But in the Faction, with shifting timelines as commonplace, there couldn't be certainty about who was there first in any dispute. Anyone who didn't get something they wanted could just nip back to before it was taken, grab it themselves, and stuff the consequences. (Which would be fine if you created a quasi-religious social order which invested value in ideological and ontological opposition to mono-directional chronology, but somewhat frustrating if that sandwich you wanted from the vending machine is shunted into an alternate timestream just before you're about to have lunch.)

So the issue gets resolved by bringing into force the clause Grandfather P himself established. It is — what else — a blood ritual, in which all conflicting claimants must participate once invoked.

Vicente doesn't stand much on family ceremony, but then again, anything's preferable to processing the next hundred-odd bone fetishists.

"Let's go then," he sighs. "Clock's ticking."

* * *

"Here," she said, her face wide with a beatific smile. "Your present. Aren't you going to open it? And Happy Christmas—" The dream he'd woken up from this morning, like every other morning, ended with the angel woman putting the present in the stocking. And when he woke up, even though it seemed so real—

Hey. This was Christmas morning, in the heartland of magic realism and state-sponsore^ repression, in the decade of Nixon and Bowie. He ought to be surprised angelic visitations were all that intruded on his sense of reality.

He'd known it was too good to last, of course. They'd catch up with him, kick him out. Well, let them. Someone else could have this Christmas to live in. Vicente was sick of being haunted.

* * *

He hesitates on the doorstep, covering the old stain of dried blood with his foot.

There's never been any point cleaning up, but Vicente still feels embarrassed as the Men Without Watches materialize. The flaking, smog-blown paintwork, the abandoned car in the courtyard below, the rusted railings on the stairs up to the flat. He shakes his head and opens the door.

It's early morning, still dark inside, sounds from the inner-city streets just now wafting up.

There's a pregnant woman on his bed, in labor. Her face doesn't look right — a mess of flesh and cartilage going in the wrong places, some parts down to exposed bone. But she is crying.

It's the angel woman.

Instinctively, Vicente moves to help her. The Men Without Watches laugh. He finds himself held back by some force in the doorway, unable

to get inside.

"Interaction between claimants is proscribed until conflicting issues are brought to their resolutionary state via the due process of the Grandfather clause," drones Seconds.

The birth is quite clearly in trouble.

"We've got to do something!" shouts Vicente, surprised at how his voice sounds.

"There exist, concomitant to these, and similar, circumstances, certain procedures, which—"

Vicente's sick of procedure. He wrenches a loose railing from the balcony, and pulls it into the palm of his hand. "What are you doing?"

Vicente squeezes down on the metal. "I'm renouncing my occupancy, okay? No disputed claims." Blood drops on the doorstep, fresh into the stain. "I'm giving this morning back to whoever wants it."

Seconds gapes. "As available legal counsel," he splutters, "I advise you with extreme insistence to reconsider."

Vicente ignores him, reciting a renunciation prayer. Seconds throws up his hand in exasperation. "Tell him," he hisses. "Tell him!"

But Hours stands, watching silently, as the rite concludes.

* * *

Conservation of artron energy kicked in like an overzealous exorcism.

That Christmas wove its way back into history. A generation affected by its events woke up, in decades to come, remembering everything.

History reasserted itself.

A ghost image of the angel woman staggered up the stairs and into the apartment. She was bleeding from her ruined face, gasping for breath. She dropped a faded photo of herself and a man Vicente didn't recognize, dressed in fashions from the last decade. Holding her stomach, with a low groan she fell into her body.

And then all the stored time that hadn't conventionally passed during

Vicente's occupancy attempted to pass at once.

The angel woman was caught in the onrush.

Still unable to enter, Vicente gazed in disbelief.

"She's a Time Lord," said Hours, after what seemed like — well, yes.

* * *

The angel woman is screaming, pushing, falling back exhausted.

"Okay, she's Gallifreyan." Vicente is frantic. "And someone's — well, why doesn't she regenerate, or rejuvenate or something?"

"There are, it seems, more important," Minutes points at the baby's emerging head, "claims."

For an awful moment, the angel woman does nothing. But then, another wrenching push delivers the child: A girl, very premature, with no navel.

The woman stops moving altogether.

"Let me through," sobs Vicente, dropping to his knees. "Just let me through."

"Interesting," says Seconds. "Watch." The ghost image of the angel woman sits up from the body. She reaches for her baby. "Depleting her artron reserves to save her daughter — transferring, one might suggest, the very essence of herself into the child rather than let the Matrix take her."

The angel woman vanishes. Vicente topples forward as the barrier disperses. The baby starts to bawl.

"Any ownership claims, previously conflicting, have been resolved, albeit in a somewhat unorthodox manner."

"You'll forgive me if I don't shake your hand," spits Vicente. But the Men Without Watches are gone.

The baby keeps crying. She beats a weak fist against her mother's unresponsive leg.

Vicente doesn't move to help her, though he could. He just watches,

as space-time swaddles itself around the girl. Because he's knows where she's being taken.

He's seen her before.

* * *

Little Cousin (Twice Removed) Vicente returned to find the waiting room in impatient uproar.

Back to his job and the realization that this was as good a home as he had — now. Endless present tense. But that wasn't the depth of his depression.

He'd thought over what the Men Without Watches said. The angel woman's 'essence' had gone dormant; the implication was she might emerge as one of her daughter's future incarnations. Or, Vicente now knew, get passed on, still a latent presence, to the dreams of her daughter's son.

The reason why he never became anything in the family was this. He's the guy from Faction Paradox who went back in time, killed his grandmother, and caused himself to be born.

* * *

Vicente glanced at the smoldering man, who was patting down the front of his trousers a little more than was perhaps necessary.

"Right. I'm going to have to ask you to leave," he said through gritted teeth, "if that's the hand... that does... *that*."

GOING NOWHERE

BY DAVID AGNEW

It was the kind of day where the rain didn't so much fall as plummet. The sort of day where, poised delicately on the edge of wispy gray clouds, distraught drops of water decided to end their troubles by hurling themselves over the side. Some of these suicidal raindrops streaked across smiling billboards; others pooled into muddy puddles or streaked across greasy windows. It was one of these blurring windows through which Harry Sullivan stared in disgust, morosely stirring a mug of some liquid or other with a forlorn pinky and picking absently through a women's magazine.

Harry hated this sort of day. It was dark and miserable, but

Going IMowhe

then, this was nothing new because every day in this city was dark and miserable. Today just seemed a shade darker and altogether more miserable than the rest. It was the kind of day, he reflected dimly, where one could fully expect to slip on the steps while leaving any given building. The kind of day in which one could similarly expect to discover that one's umbrella was, in fact, in the other coat, the dirty brown duffel draped snugly over a favorite armchair. The kind of day, in short, in which one would expect not to be sitting in a small greasy cafe tucked in the heart of a dingy metropolis and suddenly be attacked by a dozen horribly fanged orange creatures brandishing fearsome metallic-blue weapons.

It was probably due to this unexpectedness that the hardy man fell out of his chair when a dozen horribly fanged orange creatures brandishing fearsome metallic-blue instruments that Harry wasn't at all sure he liked the look of suddenly appeared out of nowhere and began mounting what appeared to be a coordinated assault on the tea lady.

Hunched under his flimsy table, Harry watched skittishly as a number of orange feet bustled around the cafe, accompanied by the crackle of electricity and a smell of ozone. He was using an already damp edition of the previous evening's *Standard* in a desperate attempt to save his leather shoes from the watery advance of a spilled pitcher of orange juice when he decided to take advantage of a flying tray of toast and followed it out the window.

This, thought Harry as he landed in a dazed sprawl with equal amounts of glass, gravel and toast tearing into his palms, was perhaps not the best of his occasional ideas. He collected his thoughts, and also his hat, and stood up just in time to be knocked down again by twelve orange creatures dashing madly out of the cafe with a wood-paneled jukebox. Two of the creatures set the machine down and gazed up at the streaming rain. From his low point of view, Harry estimated the creatures to be between eight and ten feet tall, a guess substantiated by the jukebox reaching the tallest alien's midriff. They were definitely aliens, Harry decided. He may not know the best way to handle a bomb or when to trim his sideburns, but he reckoned he knew an alien when he saw one. Sparse clothing, consisting mainly of gold cords, failed to cover much of the creatures' rubbery orange skin, and Harry was delighted to discover that the aliens were not anatomically correct, at least, not as far as humans were concerned. Each of the creature's six arms grasped some sort of blue instrument, which Harry took to be weapons on the basis that they didn't look very inviting and also caused things to disintegrate. The twelve orange beings formed a circle, with Harry and the jukebox inside, and waited expectantly.

Brilliant lights erupted from the sky, but this was perfectly normal

and nothing to be alarmed about because it was just the sun bursting through some of the less dismal rain clouds. Suddenly, the dozen aliens, the wood-paneled jukebox and Harry Sullivan were ripped molecule by molecule through the atmosphere in much the same way that a sadistic child would vacuum up ants.

* * *

The human optic system can, incredibly enough, perceive unlit objects in near darkness under certain circumstances, but when Harry opened his eyes to meet with an almost tangible blackness, it was clear that this was not one of them. A putrefying stench insinuated itself into Harry's nostrils with such force that he had to fight to keep the bile from rising in his throat. A sore hand dove into one of the many pockets of his coat only to emerge moments later with a large handkerchief, which the man brought to over his mouth and nose.

After a moment just standing there, he decided to play a hunch. "Doctor?" he called out. But there was no reply.

Despite the darkness, Harry had a feeling that the orange creatures were no longer with him, and so he decided to sit back in the inky blackness that stretched as far as his eyes couldn't see and wait for something to happen.

Accompanied by an odd squelching noise, the lights flashed painfully on, illuminating a score of shapely women wearing bowls of cleaning supplies on their heads. Harry had no idea what he had been expecting to happen, but this certainly wasn't it.

A booming mechanical voice wafted down from the rusting loudspeaker thirty feet up one of the gargantuan chamber's four walls: **NEVER MIND THEM, THEY'RE JUST THE CLEANING LADIES.**

The cleaning ladies smiled in unison and scurried daintily from the chamber, leaving Harry alone with what he now realized to be several tons of sewage. The ethereal voice began spilling "from the speaker

again. **PLEASE REMAIN WHERE YOU ARE. A GUIDE WILL BE SENT SHORTLY.** The voice was layered and mechanical, akin to several robots speaking simultaneously. For the first time, Harry heard a distinct humming noise that seemed to be everywhere at once, mysteriously like the engines of a plane or boat. The béWildered man recalled the orange creatures and began to hope with surprising vigor that he hadn't gotten drunk and joined the navy. Again.

* * *

Draped over the *Galacti-Garbage Recyclo-Matic Friction-Free Sewage Machine's* captain's chair was the *Galacti-Garbage Recyclo-Matic Friction-Free Sewage Machine's* captain. His species was such that he uncontrollably slimed. He irresponsibly drooled. He, much to the constant distress of his crew and fellow coworkers, committed acts of unprovoked flatulence. He even occasionally asked to be excused to the Little Captain's Room.

The Captain, as he liked to be called, was in much mental turmoil at the moment, the reason for which was the accidental teleportation of Harry Sullivan. His frequent jukebox raids generally passed unnoticed, but the unforeseen inclusion of the human upon return to the sewage ship presented a headache, of which the Captain was particularly unfond because of the number of heads he had. His actual number of heads was the subject of much debate among the crew, who had at least ascertained that the slimy beast had fifty-seven eyes.

The ship's automatic scanning systems had labeled the human an anomaly, and as such relegated him to a rubbish deck for safekeeping. Unfortunately, the Captain now had little choice but to return the human home with a minimum of fuss. The lure of a new jukebox was particularly compelling, and so to deal with Harry the Captain was forced to activate Ezmerelda.

Extending a slimy tentacle, the creature toggled a red button that had

been hidden under a glass jar taped firmly to a computer console and labeled: *Do not use.* A sort of singing was heard as a transparent glass tank hanging from the ceiling began to glow, followed by a colorful swirling light that arranged itself into human form. A woman floated serenely in the tank, wearing a beaten leather aviator jacket and black tights. The holographic Ezmerelda stared into the pages of a holographic fashion magazine.

The Captain looked at her in a state of agitation, his tentacles quivering in rage. He hated this. He hated her! The hologram and the Captain seemed to exist in a state of cold war. He had called her out of confinement in the ship's data storage, and she was retaliating by reading a book at him. With slow maliciousness she turned each page, peering studiously at each tiny detail.

The Captain rounded on his aid, tentacles akimbo. "Ezmerelda," he said, quickly following up with a "dear" for added effect. She flipped the magazine sideways to examine a centerfold advertisement.

"Would you kindly lead our visitor to the bridge?" he queried, his voice dripping with sarcasm and also slime. The hologram glanced at the Captain and casually tossed the magazine over her shoulder. As it fell, the pages shimmered into nothingness where they reached the edges of the hologram tank. Her computer-generated form disseminated into excitingly sexy spheres of light, which swirled around for a few moments before reforming, leaving Ezmerelda in a glinting titanium suit of military influence. She stood fully erect and saluted sharply.

"At once, Captain, sir!" she barked, just because she knew it would annoy him. Once more she vaporized into gloating globes, which raced along some exposed circuitry on the ship's walls toward the sewage hold in which, even now, Harry Sullivan was in imminent danger of passing out from the smell.

The Captain, meanwhile, grumbled to himself and then skedaddled down an adjoining corridor to the mess hall.

* * *

Ezmerelda's component elements zipped around a comer, outlining more exposed circuitry. Within seconds, her form was rematerializing in another hologram tank bulging from one of the sewage hold's walls. This failed to make much of an impression on Harry, mainly because the handkerchief that he was using to filter out the alien odors was covering his eyes. The hologram lowered her light-refracted visor and switched on several banks of lights, flooding the room. Harry put away his makeshift gas mask and peered into the brilliant white light, seeing Ezmerelda only as a massive silhouette.

After a few seconds the awe of the light faded, and was replaced by the awe of being confronted by a powerfully armored, and presumably powerfully armed, alien creature. Whatever navy he had gotten drunk enough to enlist in, it definitely wasn't from Earth.

Ezmerelda seemed to sense Harry's unease and melted into her globes again, reforming in jeans and a T-shirt.

"Perhaps this will make it easier for you?" she asked. Long ago she had realized that the only way she was ever going to get to talk to anyone interesting was to make friends with them first. She pushed back a collection of bracelets to glance at her watch. "My name is Ezmerelda, but you can call me Ez for short. The Captain wants to see you on the bridge. Over to the left you'll find a ladder; the sooner you get up here the sooner we'll have you back home."

Harry began making his way across the wreckage that undulated across the chamber. "Excuse me for asking, but where am I?"

"A sewage hold on our ship. As sanitation engineers, we coast the spaceways collecting enough garbage to meet our quota before returning to the incinerator. The Captain, however, collects music machines from the various planets we pass, and the offer of a jukebox was too good to pass up."

" So I'm not in the navy, then" Harry muttered to himself. "What?"

Ezmerelda wafted back and forth in her tank, painting her nails an even brighter shade of green. She definitely wafted, and Harry definitely didn't like it. Ghosts wafted; people didn't.

"Never mind." He reached the ladder and hoisted himself up. "You're very odd," he mentioned.

"What, because I can decompose into my base elements?"

" Well, yes. That and the fact that your feet don't touch the ground."

"Ah."

"I just thought you should know" said Harry lamely. He plunged his hands deep into his coat pockets and followed the illuminated path left by Ezmerelda as she whizzed through some more exposed circuitry. Not for the first time, he wondered if Sarah Jane still traveled with the Doctor, half-expecting them to greet him on the bridge.

He didn't think much of the ship. Rusting corridors failed to converge on rooms of any type, and Harry had gotten a sinking feeling after only a few steps. This was not, however, as a result of any emotional distress but rather because he was standing in a trail of slime up to his ankles.

"The slime trails of our odious Captain," explained Ezmerelda, who had reformed in a conveniently located hologram tank bubbling down from the ceiling. She was disconcertingly floating upside down to prevent Harry from looking up her dress, which was modeled loosely, he realized, on the famous pink number most people associated with Jackie Onassis. She reached out for her pillbox hat, which fell off her head and vanished as it touched to tank's bottom. "The, uh, Captain is a mucousy beast from..." she searched her index listings. "Er, from somewhere. Anyway, he slimes a lot and also drools. When you seem him, try to avoid the tentacles, and don't let the heads bother you."

"The heads?" Harry scrambled up from where he had tried to catch the falling pillbox hat.

"Yes. Let me know if you get an exact count — we have some pools going. You'll see; we're almost there. This way, through the kitchen," she added, once more becoming glowing spheres and passing through

a wall.

Harry saw the first door since the sewage hold and hurried through.

* * *

The kitchen was a disturbing place. It consisted of several grimy tables and a thin partition, which divided the chamber into two main areas. On the other side of the wall, Earl, the chef, was busy preparing what could only be food of some sort. Harry and Ezmerelda, now in another handy tank and also a ravishing bathing suit, both regard this man with a touch of uncertainty. One reason for this was that his oily French moustache drooped down to his feet, both of which were razor-sharp cybernetic knives. The other was that a dead rat hung crazily out of his yellow mouth. The rat shuffled from side to side as Earl hummed tunelessly, but with great passion and what could only be called gusto. On a nearby stove sat a pot of some bubbling stew, which Earl occasionally spat in, though only, he assured them, because it tasted better that way.

The whole scene worried Harry greatly, and he was immensely relieved to be lead away from the kitchen and Earl. The duo was now in a new corridor, this one dotted with doorways and portals down each length.

"Over on your left is the ship's disco," Ezmerelda was telling him, this time in a purple hostess uniform. "And here on your right are the astrogation cubicles. This is where our astrogators chart our course five-dimensionally from point to point. Come, I'll show you." Her glowing spheres zipped through some wires running through the wall, and Harry followed her through the indicated door, which opened into an impossibly huge room of deep blue, lined with tiny glass cabinets that reminded Harry of telephone booths. Sitting, slouching and otherwise occupying each was a decaying robot. Most were missing an arm or a leg, and a few, Harry was alarmed to discover, were missing their heads. Higher up, various orange creatures, the ones he had seen earlier in the

cafe, were roaming along gantries and platforms to check banks of flashing lights.

On a raised dais in the center of the room lounged a rather large purplish creature with rough skin and a tiny cardboard sign slung round his neck indicating that his name was Chief Astrogator Grahame. Gazing abstractly into space, this new creature totally failed to acknowledge his visitors' presence. Ezmerelda had occupied a hologram tank rising out of the floor, and Harry was standing next to her, staring at the lazy purple thing with mounting incredulity.

"He's your pilot?"

"Yes."

"Shouldn't he be steering or something?"

The pilot, who should have been steering or something, studied Harry idly and belched. "Hello," he said, scratching a buttock and rolling over to take a nap. Harry turned and left the room, pausing only briefly to help a robot put its legs back on.

Back in the hallway, he danced over another trail of slime and around a comer, barreling into a service lift. Ezmerelda's blazing spheres invaded the lift's circuits and the odd pair ascended thirty-four decks in silence. When the rusty door groaned open, Harry found himself on the bridge, the very heart of the sewage ship from which incredible power can be commanded.

The Captain, at that particular time, was commanding the power of the Captain's Toilet, tucked handily away in a small comer. The Captain waved a beckoning tentacle and Harry crossed over to see two small boats floating on the oily water's surface.

"Sorry for the inconvenience," the Captain burped. "We'll get you home as soon as we can reorient the transmat thingy. Here, have a boat "

Harry took the proffered stick and cautiously poked his boat, trying to avoid the slimy green water that lapped greedily around its hull. After a few moments he began to rather enjoy himself. He reached over to see the Captain's magnificent galleon, but a tentacle slapped him away. The

protoplasmic creature pressed the flush mechanism. “Look out! Hurricane! Hurricane!”

The pair of model ships spun in a violent spiral before being sucked through the maelstrom. “Now look what you’ve made me do!” cried the Captain. “Oh well. There’s more where those came from. Now, tell me about yourself.”

Harry wasn’t prepared for any of this. “Er...”

“Splendid! I often feel that way myself. Do you like my ship? I bet Ezmerelda didn’t tell you this is my hundred and fourth command. Keep crashing, you see. The company wants to give me a new astrogator, but I insist on keeping the one I’ve got. Grahame may not be the best man to pilot your ship, but give him one more chance I always say. Now, what

are you called?”

Harry was so glad for the pause that he pounced on the opportunity to say something. “Harry Sullivan, sir. He grabbed a flailing tentacle and shook it madly, surreptitiously counting the Captain’s heads. “Nice ship you’ve got here.” He gave the Captain the once over and wiped the slime off his hand in a discreet pocket. He looked over for Ezmerelda to chime in, but she was nowhere to be seen.

The Captain left the toilet and oozed over to his other throne. He had some time before he could actually get the human back to Earth and decided to entertain him with a story before inviting him to dinner. “I’ve decided to be your friend,” he announced magnanimously. Harry apparently had no say in the matter. “Shall I tell you a story?”

“No.” Harry glanced around the low-ceilinged bridge. “I’m not going to go through the usual disbelief or anything.

I mean, it’s obvious that you are an alien,” he said, not adding, “Besides, I once traveled through time and space in a police box.” Instead, he opted for, “I just want to get home, please.”

“I see,” said the Captain, and with his fifty-seven eyes it was obvious he was not lying.

“Excuse me, but why do you pick each others’ noses?” Indeed, certain

slimy protuberances were even now burrowing up a convenient neighbor's proboscis. At this the Captain collapsed in alien laughter, and Harry blinked his eyes several times. This was obviously some terribly funny alien physical comedy, and he was obviously very stupid not to have understood it.

Harry watched as the Captain shook in hysterics. Great rolls of green, slimy flesh undulated across his enormous stomach, and Harry had to step back to avoid being splattered with drool.

A pair of rusty doors squeaked open, accompanied by a horrible screech and also the one clean thing Harry had seen on the ship, a sparkling man of mauve. The robot was wearing a fabulously handsome velvet tuxedo and bore a message on a silver plate for the Captain. "For you, master," it shivered.

"What are you doing, Number Eight?" the Captain asked in indignation.

"I'm being obsequious, sir," the robot humbly replied.

"Well, I don't like it. I want you to fawn more "

"Very good, your corpulence." The robot bowed majestically and handed the Captain the message.

"Thank you, Number Eight." The Captain stood up and pointed wildly at the card with a tentacle. "Good news, Harry my friend. I would go so far as to say it was positively splendid!"

"What, you mean I get to go home?"

"Not yet. I mean it's time for dinner!"

Harry was going to tell the Captain he had been snatched away during breakfast, but decided against it.

* * *

Harry wasn't surprised to see Grattarne at the meal; it hardly seemed likely he would be needed elsewhere. He was, however, surprised to see as much of him as he did. The alien was at least twice as fat as when

Harry had last seen him, and the rate at which he shoveled down food didn't seem to be a very prudent one.

Hovering to the left of the astrogator was a bizarre bird creature, whose froglike tongue shot out to yank up squirming . globs of food. The Captain gestured to the creature with an oozing tentacle. "Harry, this is my security chief, Thaddeus." Thaddeus whirred happily before an odiferous belch from her obese neighbor brought her crashing down queasily on to the table.

"Your security chief? You mean in case someone tries to steal your garbage?"

"No, you fool, in case the incinerators refuse to take it. Here, have a seat."

Harry was dismayed to see the bubbling stew Earl had been cooking earlier set in front of his bowl. The chef put out a cigar in the pot before serving everyone a heaping helping. Harry sat back and refused to eat until a passing cleaning lady offered him a selection of fruit from her hat. Earl took off a bionic foot and sliced up a pear for Harry, and then hobbled back into the kitchen to kill dessert.

The Earthman gazed uneasily at Grahame and then leaned over to the Captain, who seemed to be leaving more on his plate than he was eating off it. "What happened to him?"

"Ah, it's his species, you see. Queer genetic makeup. For every ounce they digest, a pound of fat is created, almost instantly. Rather nasty to look at, I know, but believe me, when you're in the middle of a firefight he comes in handy. Quick bucket of chicken and voila! Instant shield!"

"That's a bit barbaric, isn't it?"

"No. Impervious skin, you see."

"Oh." Harry decided to take the Captain at his word and pursue another troubling line. "Why are your names so normal? I mean, Ezmerelda and Grahame don't seem like very alien names to me."

"A name is a name. Some sounds and syllables just roll off the tongue easier than others, no matter the species."

Harry leaned back in his chair dejectedly and munched a pear slice. So much for any grand unified theory of cultural evolution, but then he had thought that was a bit out of the Captain's league anyway. He wished Ezmerelda would turn up. At least he could relate to her somewhat. "When do I get to go home?" he asked finally.

"After we eat, Grahame has to fix the teleportation doohickey, and then we just place you in this thingamajig and 'whoosh!' you zoom back home. Can you just pass me that stew?"

Strangled screaming floated out from the kitchen, and Earl came out to say that dessert would be a while because he was having some problems that were culinary in nature, and also that the goat wouldn't die. A squad of cleaning ladies went back to assist him, leaving the dining room empty except for Harry, the Captain and their two companions. They were soon joined by Number Eight, who explained that he would have come sooner but didn't want to.

"Something big is on the monitor, sir," he intoned to the Captain.

"Ooh! Let me guess. Is it a planet?"

The robot shook its gleaming metal head.

"Nope, didn't think so. Hmm... New garbage?"

No, it wasn't garbage, they were assured.

"I give up. What is it?"

"It's a timeship, sir"

The Captain shrank back in fear and slimed a little heavier, frantically waving his tentacles. "A timeship?"

Harry moved closer to the Captain. "A TARDIS?"

"My dear friend, I haven't the faintest idea. The shrinking back in fear and waving my tentacles around madly is all for show. Keeps the others amused. A good captain understands the need for entertainment." He raised his voice importantly. "Thank you, Number Eight. Quickly everyone, to your posts! And I do not mean the disco! Do you remember what happened last time?"

Harry looked quizzically at the Captain. "What happened last time?"

"I don't know; I was asking. Come on!" He slithered back up to the bridge, and Harry had almost to walk urgently to keep up with him. Earl came out with the goat, but no one was there to eat it. Sighing in resignation, he put the rat back in his mouth, took off a foot, and cut himself a nice piece of hoof.

* * *

On the bridge, the first thing Harry failed to see was Ezmerelda, and the second thing he failed to see was Ezmerelda's clothes. She materialized with an "Eep!" and vanished, reappearing with a paisley kimono and a withering look. In his chair, the Captain reconnected a hologram circuit and jotted a check on the chalkboard he used for tallying points in the ongoing cold war between himself and his holographic nemesis. After a moment, he rushed up to his sometime foe. "Ezmerelda, there's an emergency going on!"

"An emergency? What is it?"

"It's an unforeseen crisis calling for immediate action, but that's not important right now."

"I hate you." Ezmerelda moved to a forward observation tank to get a better look at the mammoth timeship floating in space ahead of them.

Harry's face was glowing green, but this was only because he was reading a computer screen. "What does 'Total Particle Analysis' mean?"

"What?" the Captain asked, flopping forward in his chair.

"Well, whatever it is, it's happening to us."

"They're looking for something," Ezmerelda piped up. Harry was alarmed to see her frightened. Even the repugnant Captain seemed to be genuinely afraid.

The Captain called down to astrogation. "Get us out of here, Grahame!"

"No can do, sir," Grahame said. He was sitting at the base of the dome his chair rested on in an absurd lotus position. "Apparently the

navigational robots won't respond to commands. Even Number Eight isn't functioning." It was true; the auto-valet was frozen in mid-stride just outside the astrogation chamber.

On the bridge, Ezmerelda vanished and recomposed herself in a tank closer to the Captain, wearing her official uniform for once. "Whatever it is they re looking for, I think they've found it!"

A beam of pencil-thin red light arced across space and sliced open a section of the ship's green hull. Garbage began spewing out into space, and Harry thought he saw a wood-paneled jukebox spinning in the vacuum. He strained his eyes looking for a blue police box, but could see none.

The Captain was bewildered, but this was not an unusual occurrence and the crew was coping as best they could. The rubbery creature stared at Ezmerelda expectantly.

"What's going on?"

Before she could reply, an ear-splitting wail erupted from the main communications computer. Squawking gibberish soon resolved itself into English. The voice relayed was clean and precise, and the message it bore was malevolently clear. Surrender.

The Captain leapt upon the console, doing great damage to the electrical equipment in the process. "Never!" he screamed into the void.

Seventy-eight individual lasers shot forth from the glimmering timeship, threatening to tear the comparatively miniscule garbage collector violently asunder.

"Well, maybe just this once," the Captain issued meekly into a microphone.

"Captain, we're caught in a tractor beam" Ezmerelda straightened up and gave Harry a reassuring look.

"Shouldn't we escape or something?" asked Harry, who had learned a thing or two during his time with the Doctor. He had trouble taking any of this seriously. Surely Earth would have detected two such ships floating on what was, essentially, its doorstep.

"Yes, of course!" The Captain slapped a sticky tentacle across the Harry's back. He slammed down on the intercom button and began to issue commands. "Everybody—"

Harry cupped the microphone and leaned next to one of the Captain's ears. "All personnel," he whispered.

The Captain nodded energetically, spraying alien slime indiscriminately.

"Oh yes. That sounds much better." Harry moved his hand away from the microphone. "All personnel, report to shuttlecraft Nine. I repeat: All personnel to shuttlecraft Nine." He dashed to his adjoining cabin to grab a briefcase of some kind and then hurried madly off the bridge, followed closely by Harry.

"Will we all fit in one shuttle?" Harry asked breathlessly.

"This is only a garbage ship, you know. Most of the crew are robots."

Ezmerelda watched the pair leave the room, and also a trail of slime, and then deftly relayed a message to the ship's computer before shrinking into floating spheres and zipping along some circuitry toward the shuttlebay. On the screen behind her empty tank, the timeship loomed ominously closer.

* * *

Grahame squeezed through the astrogation chamber's portal and ran down the rusty corridor, dragging Number Eight with him and making only a brief detour to collect the security chief. Three decks above the shuttle bay, the trio ran into Earl, whose cybernetic legs were impeding his flight. The astrogator ordered a passing collection of tall orange creatures to carry the chef down to the shuttle. Before long, everyone was aboard.

With a reverberating clang the shuttle bay doors folded open and the chamber's atmosphere hissed out into space. As the magnetic locks in the blue shuttle's landing gear switched off, the pod floated gently into

space.

Inside, the shuttle was in a state of general chaos. A head count had proven impossible due to the Captain's presence, but it had been determined that all of the organic crew had made it into the shuttle. Ezmerelda integrated herself with the vessel's autoguidance matrix and pulled the pod three miles above the action.

Last minute scrambling to safety and basic panic ensued on the *Galacti-Garbage Recyclo-Matic Friction-Free Sewage Machine*. Service robots tripped over each other's discarded limbs, kicking abandoned heads like footballs and walking blindly into walls. Unnoticed in the chaos, a red light winked silently away on one of the bridge's computer terminals. A countdown reached zero and the forward viewscreen revealed schematics of the ship's sewage holds.

Outside the ship, airlocked doors folded open, dotting the pickle-shaped hull with dozens of holes. In compliance with Ezmerelda's last-minute plan, the contents of the sewage holds emptied into space and, as calculated, were caught in the timeship's tractor beam. Every last particle of garbage in the ship's decaying bowels poured in to the void, only to be sucked toward the timeship at incredible speed. The tractor beam, ramped up to pull the hulking mass of the sewage ship, attracted these smaller items with a force greater by several orders of magnitude. Great rifts were tom in the shimmering metal of its surface. Sensitive temporal antennas were ripped off by passing chunks of steel and jukeboxes. The net result was devastating, like an army of ants swarming over a small but magnificent sloth and leaving behind bone and tissue. Terrifying arcs of blue electricity spewed from the ship as the glowing power core at its center became ever more visible.

In short, the timeship's mysterious crew was in trouble. By this moment, however, the empty garbage collector was being swallowed by the gaping maw of the timeship's auxiliary cargo hold. The timeship shuddered for a moment and then vanished from sight as it dematerialized into the vortex, that occult interface between the phantom

dimensions of time and space.

* * *

An hour later, the Captain called a meeting in the larger of the escape pod's two rooms in order to assess the situation, which was not, on the whole, good.

"Ah, Harry, good to see you showed up."

Harry blinked slowly. Where else would he have gone? "Earl," the Captain continued, "please ask the cleaning ladies to wait in the other room. Yes, their baskets, too.

"Now then, Ezmerelda tells me that a timeship is a ship capable of traveling through time; hence the name." The Captain gave the hologram an uncertain look. "She also says that it has probably gone back in time," he gave her another dubious glance, "and that it's no good to try to follow it by flying backwards. I thought it sounded reasonable, and have decided to take a vote. All in favor say 'aye!'"

"Aye!" said Earl.

"Aye!" said Grahame.

"Aye!" said Thaddeus.

"Aye!" chorused the cleaning ladies from the other room, who had no idea what was going on but were enjoying themselves anyway.

"Good, it's agreed." The Captain curled a slimy tentacle around a lever and reversed the pod's course. The tiny pod raced backwards through space.

"Secondly, Ezmerelda points out that due to her quick thinking, the timeship is critically damaged and has a very, very, very, *very* small chance of having a definite fix on any preprogrammed coordinates. Meaning," he added, "that it flies about as well as our friend Grahame here. Yeargh!"

The last was exclaimed because at that moment the pod entered the blazing corona of Sol, the sole star of the human solar system.

Despite rudimentary heat shields designed to aid the pod in the event of an uncontrolled entry into a planet's atmosphere, the tiny ship's outer hull blistered and reddened under the immense temperature of the star. The pod's superstructure creaked and groaned in mock agony as the ultradense composition of the star pushed at the pod from all sides.

"Of course," the Captain allowed, "the basic problem with flying backwards is that you can't see where you're going." The atmosphere inside was thick enough to cut with a knife, and indeed this is what Earl was doing. The Captain twisted around to face the chef. "Earl, stop swinging your feet like that."

"What should I do?"

"I don't know. Why don't you go see if Number Eight is operational yet?"

The chef saluted smartly and hobbled out of the room. Grahame was napping in one comer, and Thaddeus was buzzing through the air above him. Harry sat and moped.

One of the tall orange creatures rushed in from the back room with a printed report of some kind, which he handed to the Captain. The gelatinous creature looked briefly over the laminated schematics before handing them over to Harry. "What can you make of these?"

Harry looked at the diagrams and tiny lettering in silent confusion and shook his head. "It's all Greek to me ."

"Ah, that may be your problem. It's in standard Andromedan," said the Captain, as if that would explain everything.

"We're going to die, aren't we?" asked Harry. "I escaped from a giant clam once, you know. Didn't expect to meet my maker boiling away in the middle of a star."

"We'll be fine."

"I thought the sun was hot enough to evaporate us."

" Have you ever been to the sun?"

"No."

"Has anyone from your planet ever been to the sun?"

" No."

"Then shut up."

Harry did, and the Captain went off to a comer to look at his two boats, which had been packed in his briefcase.

Ezmerelda appeared in the escape pod's one hologram tank. She was wearing a pale blue poodle skirt and sweater set, with her hair swept back into a ponytail. She spat out a wad of illusory gum before talking. Her image seemed to flicker slightly, no doubt caused by the stress of the sun's energy on the pod.

"I've been working on a tracer for our ship," she gestured with a tiny dildo-like tool. "Amazingly, we can track it across the timelines. I have located its physical and temporal coordinates, but unless we can both travel through time and find a way to overcome an unknown adversary, I don't think going after it is going to do us much good. After we drop off Harry we can put in for a replacement." She looked over at Grahame and the Captain. "Again.

"Secondly, I've been tinkering with the heat shields, and we should be able to hold out for about ten more minutes. The flight computer and I have also been discussing ways to escape the gravitational pull of the star in which we are temporarily located. It's here where I have some good news and bad news. First, the good news. We could just about handle an escape trajectory if we reverse the polarity of the neutron flow to the ship's engines ' The bad news, of course, is that neutrons have no polarity. The computer also tells me that although our heat shields will last for ten minutes, the area around us is going to flare in four."

"Can't we just sort of ride with the explosion?" questioned the Captain.

Ezmerelda just stared at him as though he had only nine heads.

Grahame, who had waddled up slowly to listen in, was suddenly completely awake. "No, it would work! All we have to do is make sure we're in the right place at the right time." He pushed up beside Ezmerelda's tank and began jabbering excitedly about warp factors and

photon drives. “All we have to do is shift all power to the aft heat shields.”

“What are we going to do about the rest of the ship?” the hologram asked. “I can’t possibly relocate the forward shields’ power. We’d vaporize instantly.”

“No, we wouldn’t. Bring on the ancillary generators. Here, like this.” Grahame leaned over and rapidly flicked an entire bank of switches.

The Captain watched the exchange with growing agitation.

Eventually he wrapped an oozing tentacle around the pilot’s considerable neck.

“Grahame,” he seethed, “I have one tiny question. If you know perfectly well what you are doing in this pod, how is it you have managed to destroy one hundred and three fully functional garbage cruisers?” The Captain’s tentacle tightened around Grahame’s neck.

“Well,” the pilot wheezed, “I seem to spend a lot more time in escape pods...”

“Just asking.” The Captain released his grip and wandered into the second room to show off his boats to the cleaning ladies.

The temperature inside the pod was almost unbearable, and Harry was sweating profusely. Grahame muttered something unintelligible, the first alien language Harry had heard in person since being accidentally abducted from the cafe, and buckled his immense form into a safety harness. Everyone else quickly did the same. Ezmerelda relayed a message to the flight computer and vanished just as the first tremors rocked the tiny ship.

Gargantuan arcs of superhot gas erupted from somewhere beneath the escape pod, pushing the rocking sphere out toward the dotted velvet of open space. Further eruptions gave the pod more momentum as it rode the crest of the flare. Just when the heated gasses seemed sure to start melting the ship, a smooth hatch slid open to reveal twin engines. Tiny white globes danced inside the thrusters’ hollow cups before shooting violently into the heart of the flare. The small sphere shot away

from the sun like a spurt of tobacco spat from the lips of an enormously fat man, careening past what Harry assumed to be Mercury.

After a time, Ezmerelda reappeared in the hologram tank, and the rest of the crew unbuckled their heavy straps. The computer-generated woman informed everyone that they would arrive in Earth space in about an hour. Grahame decided to shed some of his excess weight and sauntered into the ship's second room to make sure the transmat would send Harry back in one piece. Slowly, the crew found themselves in a small circle on the floor.

"I wonder what they were after," mused Thaddeus.

"I don't think it really matters," answered Ezmerelda. "Sooner or later we were bound to collect something that somebody didn't mean to be collected. We obviously took something very important to those people."

"You said they flew a timeship," Harry volunteered. "Perhaps it was something you hadn't collected yet? What if they got the time wrong and whatever they were after hasn't even been invented?"

"Like I said, it doesn't really matter."

"I think it's funny, that's all. Everything that's happened today has been out of our control. The only reason I'm sitting in this thing zooming through space is that I decided it would be a good idea to have some orange juice and toast for breakfast. After that decision, it was all taken out of my hands."

" We weren't expecting you to come here," said the Captain. "I couldn't send you home directly, either, because it takes a while to reorient the transmat. Then we were attacked by persons unknown over an object we didn't even have and which, if you are correct, hasn't even been thought of yet."

" Do you believe in fate?" Harry asked. He wasn't sure he did, not after all the things he'd seen at UNIT, but sometimes he wasn't sure about his uncertainty.

"What do you mean?" replied Thaddeus. She was resting on the floor,

presumably because her wings were tired, thought Harry.

"Are things preordained? I mean, this morning I was sitting inside a cozy cafe. All of a sudden, I was taken away from breakfast by huge orange aliens" — the rest of the crew winced at this term — "toting a jukebox. I arrive on some sort of celestial trash service and meet all of you, whom I know next to nothing about. It's like some sort of poorly written short story. No, wait a minute. That can't be it..."

"I think things are predetermined," said Ezmerelda.

"Yes, but you're a computer program. You only have a finite number of options anyway" retorted Thaddeus. Suddenly she seemed to change emotions like the hologram changed clothing. "You know what I hate? I hate small furry animals."

"I hate my job," said Harry, surprising even himself. When it stopped being so black and white, it stopped being fun, he realized. "In fact, that's why I stopped for breakfast this morning. I was thinking about whether I ought to resign." He looked at his watch. "Of course, by now I'm probably AWOL anyway."

"I hate unrequited love," said Ezmerelda steadily.

"Oh, I love it!" the Captain enthused. Ezmerelda gave him a dirty look as Thaddeus motioned for her superior to elaborate. "All those people in love with me, and I don't even have to do anything!"

Harry laughed despite himself. The hologram, try as she might, couldn't withstand the Captain's misguided sincerity and started giggling as well.

"Why are you all speaking in English?" Harry finally asked, when he had settled down and caught his breath.

"Well, would you be able to understand us if we spoke our native languages?" the Captain questioned.

"Of course not," Harry started laughing again. All at once he felt a lot better about things. If he had been back home in the gray drizzle, he probably would have run around without his umbrella, bursting into song at key points. When he did get home, he thought, he'd call Sarah

Jane. He knew she wouldn't be there; he didn't even know if the phone was still connected. But it seemed as if trying was what mattered.

One of the cleaning ladies brought out a basket of fruit balanced on her head, not unlike pictures of Indian women Harry had seen in magazines. With the help of one of the sixarmed orange creatures, the refreshments were soon distributed.

The pair retired to the second room, where Karl was fixing a

meal for the rest of the pod's occupants. Grahame lumbered into the forward chamber and informed the Captain that the transmat was ready. Harry looked out the window as Venus spun majestically beneath them.

* * *

Forty minutes later, Harry Sullivan found himself in the center of a dingy metropolis without an umbrella. The glittering rain pelted his thick hair, and his coat didn't offer much protection from the water, but Harry didn't care. He squinted up through the torrential dazzle of water and pretended that he could see a blue streak in the evening sky as his friends headed back toward the galaxy Harry knew as Andromeda. He resolved to buy an astronomy book the next morning. But first, he needed tea. He needed a sandwich. He needed to be served by a chef who had two fully organic legs.

Harry scurried up the steps into the cafe. He noticed the gaping hole in the window through which he had barreled out earlier; now it was covered by a piece of plywood. A cursory look revealed that his clothes were slightly wetter and dirtier than anybody else's, but that could be taken care of when he got home. For now, Harry cautiously sipped his tea and stared into the pages of a women's magazine, reading a story where nothing really happens and the ending is the same as the beginning.

SKULDUGGERY?

BY KEITH TOPPING AND SUZANNE M CAMPAGNA

A pink and sky blue suburban bathroom.

October 1971.

England.

First, there is the low hum — sonic vibration — so low at first that she thinks it is her own tuneless joining-in with the music of a distant transistor radio. Then it builds. And builds. And builds. Until it seems like it is ready to shred the wet skin from her bones.

Then the strobe lighting begins, cast in vast, mutated shards across the flock wallpaper.

Brilliant light. Emotionally mirrored.

Stone-cold.

Immaculate.

A rip in the fabric of reality.

rl'aelltl adj. 1. An overrated pass-time. Avoid wherever possible.

She drops her copy of Shelley's *The Revolt of Islam* to the smooth marble-tile floor in sheer terror, as the water around her seems to bubble and swirl and melt, white-hot at the center of a spiraling inferno. But there is no heat. Only a warming glow. And an infinity of light and shade. An awesome, shimmering beast appears.

Her naked flesh is goose-pricked and she shivers, despite the water's heat.

Behold, the chilling miracle of dematerialization.

Shelley would have approved. If he'd taken enough opium, of course.

Blue. Everything is blue. An ocean of ice blue, royal blue, sapphire blue, gypsy blue, cerulean blue, swimming pool blue...

Love is blue. Heaven is blue.

A cube forms from the vortex.

Hard. Solid. Tangible.

Her trauma nearly over, she reaches out a shaking hand toward the manifestation, thinking about the stuff of dreams.

The door opens.

A head pops out and a hat is raised above a vastly apologetic and embarrassed smile. A hand quickly covers alien eyes, and the head disappears as wet sponge is flung, violently, against the door. It leaves the dark stain of impact as it plops to the floor.

She screams and fumbles, blindly, for the towel, dignity having long since left the building.

"I'm sorry my dear. Missed again..." comes a voice from inside the TARDIS.

Laugh? Laugh? She nearly...

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Peter Anghelides and **Stephen Cole** have between them written Doctor Who-related material for Virgin Publishing, BBC Books, BBC Audio, Marvel Comics and Big Finish Productions. Their only joint work, the BBC novel *The Ancestor Cell,* was alliteratively voted one of the Top Ten TV tie-ins of 2001 by readers of *SFX* magazine. The question that people ask them most frequently about their novel is: "Who survives?"

David Agnew didn't write *City of Death.*

At birth, **Ken Barr** was adopted by wolves and raised in the wild. Years later he was rescued by **Diane McClamma**. They become partners in life and business, creating Ambrosia Books, and recently Ambrosia Press. They can usually be found watching *Lady and the Tramp*, sharing a plate of spaghetti.

William Billingsley is a twenty-five-year-old who isn't sure whether he's a software engineer with pretensions of literacy or an arty person with pretensions of numeracy. He recently wrote and directed *The Magical History Tour* fan radio play with BTR, and has done voice work for a number of their productions. He has performed in a dozen stage shows in Brisbane and three short films. He has lived in Australia for the last nine years, but still hasn't lost his pommie accent.

Simon Bucher-Jones has written Doctor Who for Virgin and the BBC (and some other things). He is, in person, plump, bespectacled and most likely to be seen headbanging to "The Hex Girls." His next book, *Grimm Reality,* is published in October. Talk to him about his work (or commission him for parties) at sbucheij@hotmail.com.

Ben Brown is 24 and lives in Huddersfield, England. His story, submitted on a whim after finishing a creative writing course, is based on

his own family. The fact that it was published is a bit of a fluke. Like many fans, his next big ambition is to write a novel for the BBC.

Paul Cornell has written a lot of British TV, including an upcoming run on *Casualty* and his own children's series, *Wavelength.* His first mainstream SF novel, *Something More*, is out from Victor Gollancz; the full-cast audio version of *Seasons of Fear* is released March 2002 from Big Finish.

Kereth Cowe-Spigai recently graduated from college with a Bachelor of Arts in English. She lives in the United States, but hopes to escape some day. She will be attending graduate school soon and, at some point down the road, would like to spend some time teaching high school. She is currently collaborating with Patrick Neighly on a book due out this fall titled *Anarchy for the Masses: An Underground Guide to The Invisibles.*

Jamas Enright is a would-be mathematician who got trapped in the job of a librarian. He lives in New Zealand and contributes to the national Doctor Who fanzine, *Time/Space Visualiser*, by writing articles, reviewing books and occasionally writing stories. Has a few Doctor Who books he would like to write, but then so does everybody...

Chris Heffernan is a struggling thirty-year-old Canadian actor and writer. He spends his time between the big-city life of Toronto and the small-town life of Smiths Falls. He likes to dub movies with his own audio and enjoys a good game of hockey. And if Winona Ryder could return his sunglasses, he'd be very appreciative.

Craig Hinton lives in London and just about earns a living as a freelance IT journalist and PR consultant. He is the author of eight novels, including four Doctor Who books, and spends what little spare time he has reading comics and watching *Buffy the Vampire Slayer.* His earliest memory of Doctor Who is watching *The Evil of the Daleks* aged three and being scared witless ; *A Meeting of Minds* is payback for the resulting 34 years of sleepless nights.

Award-winning journalist **Patrick Neighly** has reported on telecommunications from four continents. He is currently based in

Thailand. His next book with Kereth Cowe-Spigai, *Anarchy for the Masses: An Underground Guide to The Invisibles*, is due out this fall.

Kate Orman has written more than ten popular Doctor Who novels, including *The Left-Handed Hummingbird* and *The Room With No Doors*. Her latest book, *The Year of Intelligent Tigers*, was published in June.

Phil Pascoe lives in Western Australia and has written the August 2002 Big Finish audio adventure *...ish*. Prior to *Grandmother Clause*, he wrote a story for another charity fan anthology which also stole Lawrence Miles' ideas. Disgraceful.

Mark 'Ubiquitous' Phippen gets about a bit. Not content with editing the groundbreaking charity short story collections *Perfect Timing* (with Helen Fayle) and *Missing Pieces* (with Shaun Lyon), he has also contributed stories to *Perfect Timing* 2, *The Cat Who Walked Through Time*, *The 13 Crimes of Doctor Who*, *Tales of the Solar System* and *Walking In Eternity*, and is a regular contributor to the fanzine *Eye of Orion*. Mark lives in Southampton in the UK with his wife Lesley and children Tessa and Ryan.

Doris Speed-Keller grew up in Switzerland, where they speak foreign languages and didn't show DOCTOR Who on television. Therefore, it's no wonder she now hides in deepest Norfolk behind a pile of books. Her short stories have appeared in *QWF (Quality Women's Fiction*), *Writers' Cauldron*, *Beyond The Rose* and several Doctor Who fanzines.

Alex Steer lives in darkest Surrey, where he spends much of his time reading and writing (and, therefore, much of his money on books and ink). He really should be working, but this is more fun. *Acts of Kindness* is his third published short story — the others have appeared in the charity collections *Missing Pieces* and *Walking in Eternity*.

Keith Kopping and **Suzanne M Campagna are** a gestalt entity, the constituent parts of which emanate from Newcastle upon Tyne, England (where all the good footballers come from) and Boston, Massachusetts (where they don't like tea). They both support the humanist cause of this

fanzine and are happy to have their name(s) associated with it.

Evan Waters is a twenty-year-old college student from Kansas City, in the suburb of Fairway. He is majoring in English and recently completed his sophomore year; his junior year will be spent abroad at Homerton College, part of Cambridge University. Apart from writing and Doctor Who, his interests include movies, bike riding and role-playing. This is his first published story.

AFTERWORD

BY PATRICK NEIGHTY

Hillary was pilloried for saying it takes a village. That a prominent political figure might cut through the crap and point out what we'd all already learned as children, i.e. the value of sharing, seemed the height of naive stupidity to the Washington conservative elite.

The irony, of course, is that congressional conservatives had constructed an entire group persona around so-called traditional values, those phantom mores that nobody can quite identify, but which surely have something to do with baseball, apple pie and kindergarten. The reaction to Clinton's book only served to illustrate how deeply the paradoxical rift had grown between conservative image and conservative ideology. Here was a power base that sold itself on the near opposite of its actual beliefs and practices. In calling for traditional values on a global scale, Clinton was essentially announcing that the emperor had no clothes.

But more than a canny expose of conservative hypocrisy, Hillary was right. It *does* take a village to make things better. We can, as Kereth points out in her introduction, do everything in our power on the local level. But some problems are too big for us to tackle individually. A finer world doesn't come from my best effort — it comes from *all* of our best efforts.

This is something that the makers of Doctor Who have known for decades, of course. The character is hardly a Superman figure, appearing faster than a speeding bullet to maintain the status quo. This is a hero

who wants to make a difference, who knows that traditions exist to be challenged, that money isn't important, that robots are people, too.

Doctor Who in a nutshell: Robots are people, too.

What's more, he is rarely the sole agent of change. The prototypical story finds the Doctor and his companions building coalitions among native resistance groups, members of the ruling class, ordinary people. The Doctor may be the hero of the series, but his heroism rarely happens alone. Rather, he's a symbol, an avatar of the collective efforts of other characters in each story, be they cultish Mentiads, a Holmesian double act or ageing art dealers.

It's worth remembering, too, that this most humanist of secular heroes originally debuted as an amoral kidnapper, unconcerned about the oppression of others and the inherent value of life. The first season is a *tour de force* in character development, and it is here that the Doctor learns the basic values that will drive the series to succeed for nearly forty years. Eventually overwhelmed by the group effort of his impetuous granddaughter and their two victims, he discovers the supreme value of compassion, forgiveness, family, charity and human dignity.

So what then are we to make of this strange series, this ongoing Buddhist parable disguised ostensibly as populist family entertainment, in which the central character finds himself reincarnated after each lifetime into an even more heroic and compassionate figure?

Well, among other things, that it takes a village. And that's where Amnesty International comes in, an organization at the forefront of humanitarian intervention. If ever a group existed in the real world that better fit the ideals and spirit of Doctor Who, I can't think of it.

Week after week, while the Doctor is fighting thinly veiled allegories against racism, sexism, homophobia, violence, oppression, torture and even at one point Thatcherism, the heroes of Amnesty International do much of the same work offscreen. Their success is the result of the efforts of unsung thousands, people willing to fight for what's right without the

reward of a catchy theme tune or star credit. Amnesty International is, like the Doctor, an avatar, brought to life by the global village.

I am honored to be part of such a worthy project. Every penny of the proceeds from this book is being donated to Amnesty International; the writers have shared their stories free of charge; the lovely Anne Marie Home donated her time and considerable skills to designing the logo and book, Kereth and myself have compiled, edited and coordinated this volume voluntarily, following on the ideological freeware created by the original *Perfect Timing* volume and the kind heart of the BBC, which has seen fit to quiedy allow the continued existence of charity collections.

I urge all readers to join their local Amnesty International branch. Make a difference. Be a hero.

PUBLISHER'S NOTE

BY KEN BARR

What you have in your hands is the artistic "child" of two very kind and talented individuals, Kereth and Patrick. *Doctor Who: LifeDeath* is the culmination of their hard work and determination, augmented by the exceptional talents of Peter, Stephen, Simon, Paul, Craig, Phil, Keith, Kate and so many others. Ambrosia Press is especially proud to help give birth to this project, and it is the first published effort under the banner *Ambrosia Press.*

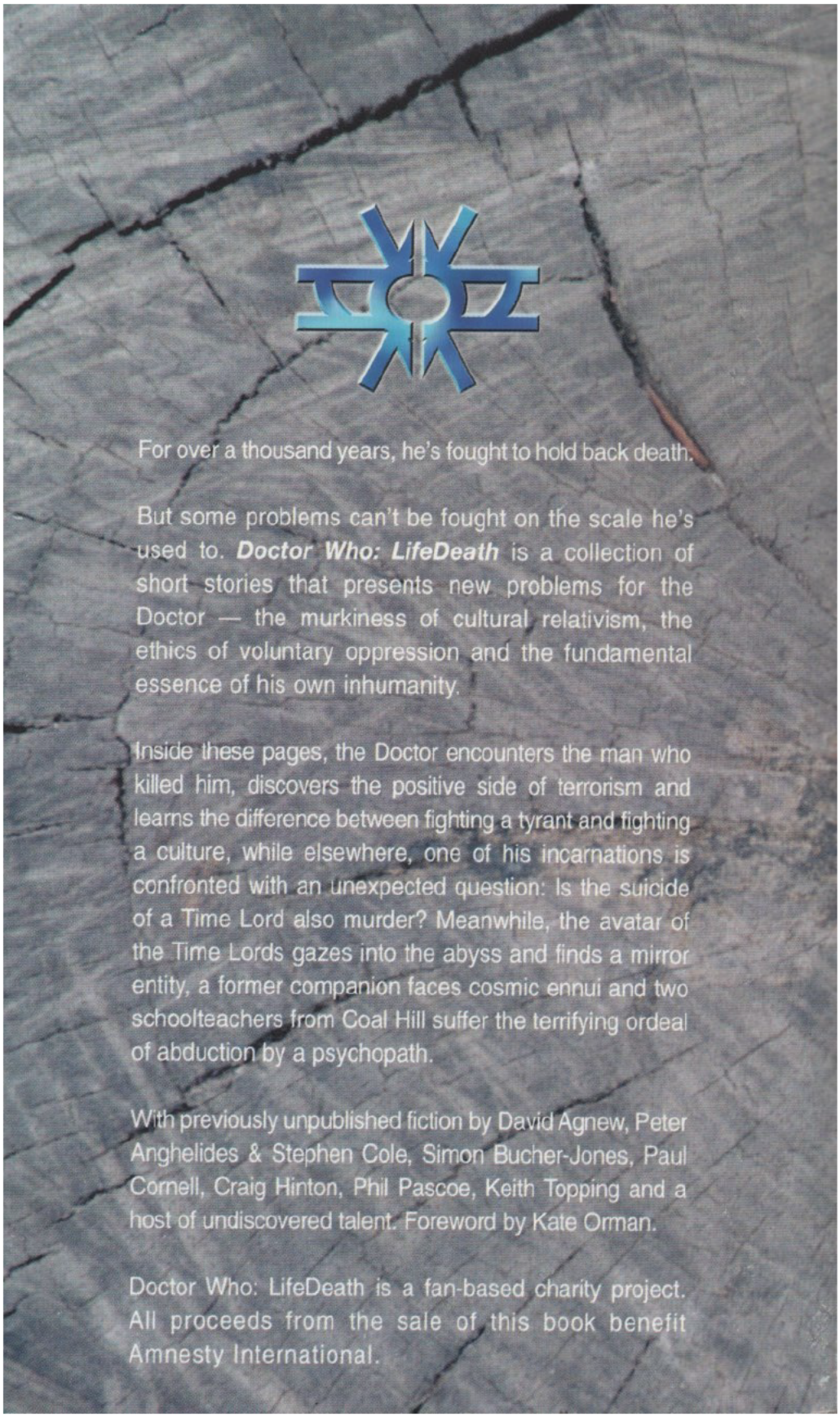
When we started our business, Ambrosia Books, over ten years ago, our goal was to provide our customers with items that touched their hearts and helped to keep their inner child alive — no matter what their age. Ambrosia Press is an offshoot of this commitment. We intend to do a series of books, graphic novels and children's books. Each would benefit a different charity; each book would do some good.

Doctor Who: LifeDeath, our first published effort, gives all proceeds to an exceptional charity: Amnesty International. This organization serves no flag, no ideology, and no one faith, but it battles against the real monsters of this world — those who rob the innocent of property, of dignity, of life. Those who are jailed for speaking their mind and become prisoners of conscience. Amnesty International, like the good Doctor himself, cannot sit idly by and let the innocent suffer. Amnesty International tries to intervene, to give comfort, to ease cruel punishment, and sometimes to earn the innocent their freedom.

By buying this book, you might just help save a life! And for that we thank you.

Harm no one. Give without taking. Help those who are hurting. IN A UNIVERSE FULL OF WORLDS, NO ONE NEEDS TO BE ALONE.

Ambrosia Press — Founded June 2001
An offshoot of Ambrosia Books & Collectibles Ken Barr and Diane McClamma Owners/Publishers.



For over a thousand years, he's fought to hold back death.

But some problems can't be fought on the scale he's used to. ***Doctor Who: LifeDeath*** is a collection of short stories that presents new problems for the Doctor — the murkiness of cultural relativism, the ethics of voluntary oppression and the fundamental essence of his own inhumanity.

Inside these pages, the Doctor encounters the man who killed him, discovers the positive side of terrorism and learns the difference between fighting a tyrant and fighting a culture, while elsewhere, one of his incarnations is confronted with an unexpected question: Is the suicide of a Time Lord also murder? Meanwhile, the avatar of the Time Lords gazes into the abyss and finds a mirror entity, a former companion faces cosmic ennui and two schoolteachers from Coal Hill suffer the terrifying ordeal of abduction by a psychopath.

With previously unpublished fiction by David Agnew, Peter Anghelides & Stephen Cole, Simon Bucher-Jones, Paul Cornell, Craig Hinton, Phil Pascoe, Keith Topping and a host of undiscovered talent. Foreword by Kate Orman.

Doctor Who: LifeDeath is a fan-based charity project. All proceeds from the sale of this book benefit Amnesty International.